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JANUARY, 1960

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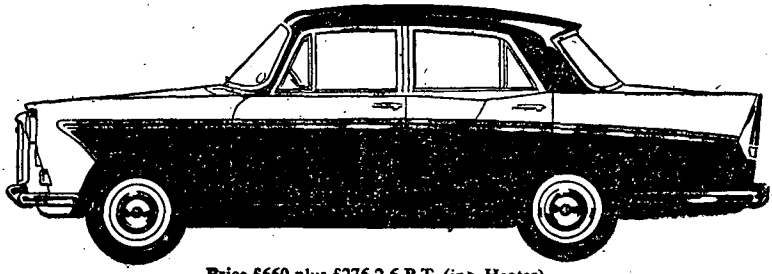

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ARGOSY

A Fleetway magazine

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Log Book

NOW that we know what the reverse side of the moon looks like, some of the romance has been rubbed off it; we're bereft of the fun of speculation. No Britannia holding a toasting-fork; no small plaque: Tradesmen's Entrance; and worst of all, no Father Christmas complete with Dasher and Dancer, Donder and Blixen, antlers and whiskers a-sparkle, all raring to be off. Bang go a whole batch of Christmas fallacies.

Mercifully there are still a sizeable number of unexplored stars and planets on which F.C. may have set up his base; we ourselves rather incline to Sirius, by whose light, as the poet Browning said, a young chap in a passion delirious Did a hair-raising act made much worse by the fact That the hair was not his but Porphyria's. (Argosy party game: abbreviate any well-loved old poem into a limerick, send us the result, and we'll pay you a guinea if it's witty and printable.)

Harking back to Santa Claus, we can't help worrying about this new theory that space-travel only takes a fraction of terrestrial time, so that those terribly boring books which we foresee as Christmas presents in the near future—*My Forty Years in a Steel Capsule*—will all have been written by earnest young twenty-year-olds. At that rate, old St. Nick must be little more than a tiny tot by now and, with his reinfawns, hardly equal to the rigours of spacemanship, particularly now that the hazards include snails on landing-strips . . . But wait! What is that sound we hear? It is the patter of tiny feet down the chimney!

Choosing presents is bad enough, in all conscience, but it has become a thousand times harder since the master-minds invented consumer guide magazines, and those ominously well-

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informed articles in Sunday papers that warn the purchaser what to avoid.

It seems to be one of the laws of economics that the warnings are issued just after one has fallen into the error of buying a gramophone without a Dudgeon motor or an electric razor without a gyroscopic bristle-disposer.

The safest way of choosing a present, of course, is to get hold of a copy of the Import List, you'll find plenty there to please the most esoteric taste. Under M, alone, for example, is a series beginning Molasses, Molybdenum, Monkey Nuts, Monocles, Mother-of-Pearl Buttons, Moulded Chocolate, Mouth Organs, Mum . . . which at a blow disposes of old Nurse, brother-in-law, Uncle Fred, Aunt Alice, the children . . . The nature of Mum is in doubt, but whatever it is it should be suitable for Mum. If these fail to please under the C's we find Concertinas, Corozo Buttons (what can they be?) Cyanide (for the children next door,) and then the eye wandering to D picks out Daters—for teenage daughters or de-stoning dates— Which?

Then there are Hoods, Hoofs, Hooks, Hoops, Horse-Shoes, Horses (with or without Hoofs, presumably) and Howitzers. One of those ought to delight your secretary. Any literary friend would be pleased with a Typescript, and, for little last-minute gifts, it might be wise to lay in a stock of Unenumerated Spirits, Voltmeters, Works of Art, Yolk, egg, and Zipp fasteners, with an extra p for security reasons.

If nothing here appeals to the fastidious purchaser, there is, however, one present that will never wilt, shrink, crack nor wrinkle, the only one of its kind, so no need to worry about looking for the label. You've guessed it—why not write to the subscription department now?

The address is inside the front cover.

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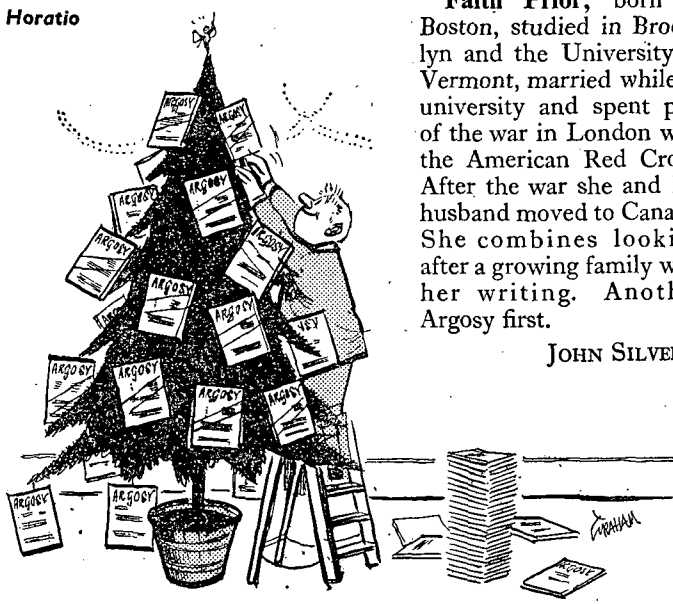
This month we have fiction to put you in a festive mood from our old friends Geoffrey Household, John Collier, Edward Lindall, and Berkely Mather—who has moved away from a Mediterranean setting and got some snow on his boots.

Readers who enjoy Graham's inspired embellishments to this feature—they are far more than mere illustrations—will be interested to hear of his new book of cartoons, *Please Sir I've Broken My Arm*, published by Nicholas Vane.

John Bonett, whose first story in Argosy appears on page 13, was born in Northumberland, and works with a firm of publishers. He's married to writer Emery Bonett and their collaboration has resulted in one son, two detective novels, a film comedy, and a shared antipathy to ready-sliced bread. He gives his hobbies as gardening and deciphering own handwriting.

Martin Armstrong, another Northumbrian, is a novelist, ex-radio and television critic, and poet. Now retired, he lives in Sussex and writes for pleasure, interspersing this with weaving rugs which have occasionally been taken for Yugoslav peasant art, much to his amusement. Hobbies: learning Russian and escorting the pub cat back home.

Horatio



Merry Christmas !

Faith Prior, born in Boston, studied in Brooklyn and the University of Vermont, married while at university and spent part of the war in London with the American Red Cross. After the war she and her husband moved to Canada. She combines looking after a growing family with her writing. Another Argosy first.

JOHN SILVER

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SKI TEST

Wind shrieked past—
the words were torn from her lips

BY BERKELY MATHER

IT could not be called a wolf-whistle. It was a quick intake of breath, but it was more expressive than a cheer—and completely involuntary.

Jane felt herself flushing, but she retained enough of her self-possession to incline her head towards him in a gracious little half bow of acknowledgment which she switched to a downward glance at the folds of her skirt when she realised that the compliment was not meant for her. The flush remained, but now it was one of embarrassment. She turned aside and joined the rest of the English party at the bar.

The young man passed her with a slight nod and advanced to meet the real object of his admiration.

The other girl, who had entered on Jane's heels, paused for a moment just inside the door. The pause was perfectly timed and, like everything else about her, practised, assured, poised—almost professional.

" Italian," muttered Kingsley as Jane slid on to the stool beside him. " Minor film star or a model, I should say. Phoney as a glass diamond—but she's beautiful! "

" Did you see her coming down the top run this afternoon? " asked Bilston. " Talk about poetry on skis. She scarcely seemed to touch the snow."

" Too much make-up," sniffed Mrs. Allen.

" Like hell," said her husband. " I sat near her in the lounge at tea. Peaches and cream through an olive filter—and all her own."

" That après-ski outfit she's wearing cost somebody more than plenty," mused Bilston. " I know—I'm in the business.

" She's hooked that instructor of yours, Jane," he went on. " His eyes are sticking out like organ-stops. Whacko! He's bringing her over to us."

Jane felt them come up behind her, but she concentrated on a saucer of salted almonds and refrained from turning her head.

The young man said, " May I present Signorina Marlena

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Fortini? Mrs. Allen, Mr. Allen, Mr. Kingsley, Mr. Bilston—and, of course, Miss Jane Langley, my most promising pupil."

Jane, once more in command of herself, half turned and dropped a smile into the murmur of welcome from the others.

Fat little Bilston slid off his stool and offered it to the Italian girl with the gesture of a courtier.

He then placed himself behind her, effectively cutting out the ski instructor.

"Back to your pupil, Lothario," he smirked. "I'll look after this young lady."

The young man smiled and moved along to Jane. "Shall we dance?" he asked her.

Angry with herself for not having a graceful refusal ready, she allowed him to lead her out of the bar to the small dance floor. The band was playing something soft and dreamy. He danced as he skied, effortlessly and without conscious volition.

They did not speak for some minutes, and then he said, "So tomorrow is the last day for you? You should spend it practising that stem christie on the nursery slopes; and in the afternoon will be the silver medal test. You will pass it easily, and I shall come and watch you, and I shall be very proud."

She felt herself flushing again, but this time it was with anger. "I understood that tomorrow's programme was already arranged," she flashed. "We do that climb to the Harzerhorn and then come back across country in time for the test, don't we?"

He shook his head. "I think it better that you should do the stem turns."

"But you said yourself this morning that I was ready for the climb," she insisted.

"I am sorry," he said. "I have thought more about it since. You should not do the climb."

She stopped dead at the edge of the floor. "I intend to do the climb," she said quietly. "I have every confidence in myself, and you have entered me in the club book for it."

He looked miserable.

"Please, Jane," he begged, "do as I say. I made a mistake. You are not ready for it—"

Lenzerheim, the Swiss chief instructor, passed them, dancing with a giggling French schoolgirl. He gave them a thumbs-up sign.

"Ohé, Jane!" he called. "So tomorrow it is the Harzerhorn climb, eh? If you are not in the first three down I eat my skis, boots and all. And for the test afterwards, a bottle of champagne on me."

She turned to the young man. "So?" she said.

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"Jane—" he began.

"Listen, Mr. Erich Stromberg," said Jane through clenched teeth. "I have saved for a year for this course. You have passed me out as proficient, and now you have heard the chief instructor confirm it. I don't know what your idea is, but I shall be at the starting-point at eight o'clock tomorrow morning. If you are not prepared to take me I shall appeal to Mr. Lenzerheim—"

"I can only take six—"

"I am already one of that six—"

"Jane," he said desperately, "I have had to drop you and take another in your place."

The rank injustice of it took her breath away for a moment. She just stared at him, and then when speech returned she said in a tight little voice that was not her own, "Signorina Fortini, I take it?"

He nodded without speaking and avoided her eyes. Jane said, "Your private affairs are your own, but the course I have paid for and worked for is *mine*. I shall be there at eight."

She turned on her heel and left him.

Four of the five men who were due to make the climb were waiting at the start-point when she arrived. She was praying inwardly that there would not be a scene. In fact she had already made up her mind that she would back out gracefully if Erich insisted on taking the Italian girl in her place. But as she knelt in the snow making the final adjustments to her ski-bindings Lenzerheim arrived with the fifth man—on a sledge.

The man was grinning ruefully and his foot stuck out starkly in front of the sledge. Drawings and scribblings covered the plaster cast that encased it.

"Himmel!" roared Lenzerheim. "The fool makes seven descents of the Harzerhorn—and then breaks his damn leg falling down the steps from the bar. So there will be five only for Erich to take up this morning."

"Six," said Jane maliciously. "I think Erich must have anticipated this. He had already arranged for one more. Here they come now."

Erich came up with the Italian girl. She skidded to an expert stop by the starting-line and waved cheerily to Jane.

"What's this?" demanded Lenzerheim, "How could he know? The names were entered yesterday at four. This accident occurred late last night—"

But Erich was already sledge-stepping towards the ski-lift. He gestured to the climbing party to follow him and they set out in line. Two men, Jane, the Italian girl, and the two last men . . .

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Jane braced herself against the wind at the top of the summit slope. From the snow-covered cairn that marked the actual peak of the Harzerhorn, a bare ten metres above them, an icy plume was ascending into the rapidly greying sky.

She was warm after the hour's climb from the top of the ski-lift but this change in the weather made her shiver a little. Erich came along the line, giving them their last briefing.

"Great care, please," he told them. "I do not like this sudden change. Soon we will have snow, and visibility will drop to almost zero. Keep closed up, and remember at the third traverse to turn right—*right*—if you lose sight of the man in front. Turn left and you will be over the frontier—and there will be trouble with the Italian passport people. Ready, Herr Strelitz?"

The man at the end of the line raised his ski-stick.

"Right. Off you go, please. Count ten, Mr. Andrews, then follow. Another ten, Signorina Fortini. Then you, Jane. Then Mr. Kingsley. Another ten, then Rudolf. And I shall come last. Prudence, ladies and gentlemen, but also speed. You will not stop if anybody falls. That will be left to me. Andiamo!"

The first two were already speeding down the slope, and then the Italian girl was off. Jane punched viciously into the snow with her sticks and hefted forward. She would have to follow the creature down the piste, but when they opened out on the lower slopes in half an hour it would be every man for himself.

"She can probably lose me," Jane muttered to herself. "But if I'm not across the line before her, I'll break my neck willingly."

And then there was no more time for thought. The snow was deep but there was an icy crust to it—fast, hard, frictionless. First came that inevitable hollowness at the pit of the stomach, and then, deliciously, the drunkenness of speed. The wind shrieked past the hood of her anorak, the first icy flakes of the coming blizzard stung her face and misted her goggles.

She was at the first right-handed traverse now, stemming hard with her left ski and shifting her weight on to the downhill foot—and she was round and running free again.

At the next, left-handed, bend would be a christiania; skis parallel, sticks down hard, skis up and round in a hairpin turn. Again she was round before she had repeated to herself the hardly-learnt drill.

The snow was falling thickly now and she was in a white vacuum, the figures in front of her momentarily blotted out. But her skis were in their grooves, and she knew the piste walls would keep her on track to the next traverse. Right—she had to go right there. The traverse marker flashed past her. She started

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her stem and turn to the right, but even as she did so the falling snow cleared a little and she saw the Italian girl go left and over the shoulder of the slope.

For a moment she knew wild exaltation. *That* put the stupid idiot out of it. Not up to the Harzerhorn run, eh? Let him remember that when she was back at the hotel tonight and the apologetic Swiss police were trying to bail the Italian out of some customs post!

But then the sportsmanship that is an integral part of this glorious winging over the open, clean spaces took charge, and she found herself yelling, "Right, *right*, signorina!" But the words were torn from her lips in the rush of the wind, and she forgot her own turn and was speeding left over the shoulder after the Italian. She was still yelling when she hit the soft patch halfway down the slope—and then her mouth was filled with snow, she was sinking in a white drift, and there was a sharp stabbing pain in her left knee.

She kicked free of the safety-clips on her skis and struggled shakily to her feet. The falling snow had closed in again and completely blotted out everything except the ends of her skis, sticking ingloriously out of the snowdrift. She took a step towards them—and her knee buckled under her, and really hurt this time.

So this was it. Out on an upper slope in a blizzard with a broken leg. The men behind her, intent on their own traverse, would have missed the tracks to the left and would not know that the girls were off course until they arrived at the bottom. The rotten injustice of it! First, to be nearly pushed out of her place by that little beast, and now to be lost with a busted knee, just when she was ski-ing as she had never skied before.

She brushed away angry tears with a rapidly-freezing glove. And then she saw the dark figure climbing back up the slope to her, and the Italian girl pushed her down into the snow and was running questing fingers over her legs.

"Twisted, not broken," she said. "Put on your other ski and lean on me. We must hurry."

"Why on earth did you turn left—?" Jane began angrily.

But the other girl checked her impatiently. "Come, hurry," she said. "I'll take the other ski—presto, presto."

Three-legged, they sped down the slope in a miracle of equilibrium, arms interlocked, bodies swaying in rhythm to the turns. "Why—did you want—to come on a novices'—run—if you can—ski like this?" Jane gasped, but the Italian shook her head.

At the bottom of the slope was a skiers' shelter. The girl

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left her for a moment and wrenched open the door. "Come," she said. "I will get the stove alight, show you the first aid things. Here you will be all right. Hurry, I must go on."

Then there was a shout from behind them, and Erich arrived in a flurry of snow. The Italian girl swore, and said something that was not in the phrase book Jane had been given.

Erich picked up Jane in his arms and carried her inside. The girl broke out into voluble Italian and together they ripped up the seam of her ski-trousers and bound her knee expertly. The Italian was scowling and muttering.

Erich straightened and smiled at Jane. "It is not bad," he said. "An hour's rest and we can continue. I speak to the committee and we give you your silver medal by default. You skied like a veteran—and you were the sportswoman. You turned the wrong way because you thought this bad creature had made the mistake. I know; I was behind you."

He turned to the Italian girl and said something that Jane didn't understand. For a moment the Italian didn't either—then her face cleared and she smiled like the warm sun breaking through the grey clouds over the Harzérhorn. She threw her arms round Erich's neck and kissed him on both cheeks and then did the same to Jane—and she was back on her skis and away down the slope while Jane was still begging for enlightenment.

"She will end on the gallows, that one," grinned Erich. "That anorak of hers is no doubt stuffed with Swiss watches. She joins ski parties and takes the wrong turning by mistake. Today I thought I would catch her, but I am a better ski instructor than detective. That is why I did not want you to come—so I could watch her more closely and not be worried about you breaking your neck."

"You let her go?" asked Jane.

He nodded. "I have let the smuggler go. I tell you, I am a bad detective. But she came back to help you. That is enough for me, my little Jane. Come, we will make some coffee. Then we shall go and I shall persuade the doctor to say that you are not fit to travel to England tomorrow, for we have much to talk about, you and I."

And like the Italian girl he smiled—like the sun through the clouds of the Harzerhorn.

© Berkely Mather 1959

★ ★ ★

FAIR DEDUCTION

Psychologist: a man who, when a blonde enters the room, watches everybody else.

BRUCE PATTERSON

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NIGHT CALL

It was a voice to pluck the heart-strings

BY JOHN BONETT

SUSAN. *Last Friday at* 11 *p.m. you were given a wrong number. That telephone call saved my life. May I thank you in person? Please write.* J.R., Box 2170.

This advertisement appeared in the personal columns of yesterday's papers. For a whole day J.R. has been sitting alone in his flat, waiting for the rattle of the letter-box, waiting for an envelope addressed in an unknown hand.

I know that J.R. will never rest until he has found Susan. I know this without any doubt—because I am J.R.

Eighteen years ago I came of age. My father had died two months earlier, leaving me fifty pounds in cash, the tail-end of the tenancy of a small flat in Kensington, and a paid-up subscription to the Shaftbury club to which I had recently been elected. He left nothing else.

As I walked up the wide stone steps of the Shaftbury club, depression sat like a vulture on my shoulders.

The hall-porter sitting at half attention in his glass-fronted box, bade me good morning and commented noncommittally on the weather. Going into the luncheon room I looked round the long central table, hoping to see someone I knew. But there was only one empty chair and my immediate neighbours were strangers, though the face of the man on my right was vaguely familiar. He spoke to me after I had ordered and we talked generalities for a time; then he said, " I knew your father. My name is Henry Sharlock. I wonder if you would spare me a few minutes after lunch."

" Of course, I should be delighted." I wondered why Sharlock of all men should wish to talk privately to me.

Most people knew of Hammerbeck Enterprises, and Henry Sharlock was the voice of Hammerbeck; at any rate, his was the voice the public heard. For Julius Hammerbeck, who controlled that vast consortium, was only a name, one of the half-dozen most powerful names in the City.

Sharlock came straight to the point.

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" I've been making inquiries about you," he said, " and I know your circumstances. Would you be interested in a job with Hammerbeck's? "

" Any job with prospects would interest me."

" Very good," he said. " The job I have in mind is with Julius Hammerbeck himself."

My astonishment seemed to amuse him. He smiled briefly and went on. " As you probably know, Julius Hammerbeck is a recluse. He lives in a private suite in the Hammerbeck building and sees no one but a companion called Cremer, a lifelong friend."

" But you—" I began.

" Yes," he interrupted. " Although I have charge of his enterprises, I have only seen him once—and that was many years ago. There have been all kinds of rumours: that he is insane, that he is disfigured, that he is a crippled invalid in a wheelchair. He is certainly not insane. He is one of the most brilliant businessmen on earth."

He stopped and looked searchingly into my eyes. " You will keep everything I tell you to yourself, Randall. The job I am offering you is worth a thousand a year from the start. If you prove satisfactory, as I think you will, your salary will rise by five hundred annually. There is no top limit."

" And what is the job? " I asked, trying to conceal my amazement.

" To be Julius' secretary—one of his secretaries; he has five. Between them they cover their employer's interests—politics, the stock market, commodities, productivity, and organisation. Each secretary must know his subject encyclopædically and be able to answer any question on it. You would replace the commodities man who died recently. There will be a training period of six months and then a probationary six months. If you accept, your salary begins today."

The munificence of his proposal had taken my breath away. I hesitated. He said, " If you're wondering why I offer you the job, your Oxford tutor is an old friend of mine. One of the many things he told me about you was that you had a memory like a card index—and that's what you need, if you are to stay the course."

" If I don't," I said fervently, " it won't be for lack of trying."

For the next six months I worked from early morning far into the night. In Mincing Lane, on the Baltic Exchange, in dusty places in and around the City of London, I listened to experts on commodities from titanium to pepper, from cotton to shark oil. I studied until the print blurred before my eyes.

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Then Sharlock summoned me to Hammerbeck House. "Your probationary period starts next week," he told me. "Your room on the next floor is ready. You will make your first report to Mr. Hammerbeck tomorrow."

There was a note almost of reverence in his voice as he spoke the name. The same tone was apparent when he sent for me the following day. We went up to the top floor in a lift marked *Private*, and walked along a short passage. Sharlock rang the bell. The door was opened by one of the biggest men I have ever seen. He had the build of a wrestler and the face of a dedicated professor; his hair was iron grey, his complexion the colour of separated milk, his manner austere.

"Good morning, Mr. Cremer," Sharlock said pleasantly. "This is Randall."

Montagu Cremer held out his hand; it was cold and dry. He took us into a magnificently-furnished hall and went out through a door on the right. Sharlock sat down at an enormous walnut desk and motioned me to sit on the other side. He glanced at his watch. "Another minute," he said. He remained silent until the half-hour, then pressed a button on a black metal box that stood beside the telephone.

"Sharlock, sir," he reported.

"Good morning," came a voice from the black box; it had a sharp, meticulous tone that gave no picture of the man behind it; yet there was a quality in that voice that made itself felt. As I grew to know it well, that voice coloured and controlled my life.

"I am glad to welcome you, Mr. Randall," Julius Hammerbeck continued. "You will make your first report to me here today. Please remain seated. Sharlock, will you return at four o'clock?"

Sharlock rose and smiled at me encouragingly. I heard the door close, and I was alone with the black box and childishly apprehensive.

"Don't be nervous," said the voice. "I have had excellent reports on your progress. If you live up to them, we shall get along very well. Now, are you ready?"

"Yes, sir," I replied. Already Julius Hammerbeck had somehow contrived to put me at my ease, to make me accept the strangeness of this interview.

"Then will you give me a summary of the condition of the wool market and your forecast of price levels?"

I took my time before answering and he waited in silence. As the figures flowed across the screen of my visual memory, I spoke them into the black box. Finally I gave him a guarded appreciation of the market and of the trends as I foresaw them.

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"Thank you," he said when I ended. "Then you consider the brokers optimistic?"

"I do, sir."

"I agree, Mr. Randall. I think we shall work well together. Tomorrow at the same time, then—and will you please be ready to talk to me about nickel."

The black box clicked and fell silent. As if on cue the door opened and Cremer came softly in. It was apparent from his expression that he knew I had passed the test. He showed me to the lift. As he turned to go, a smile cracked his impassive face; it was an odd smile.

Two or three times each week during the next five years I took that lift to the top floor, sat at the walnut desk, and pressed the button on the black box. If there was any commodity upon which I was not questioned during those years, I do not know of it. Hammerbeck's thirst for information was insatiable; his use of it approached wizardry. The instructions which he gave to Sharlock brought millions into the Hammerbeck coffers. In the markets of the world Julius seemed omniscient and omnipotent.

As time passed I came to know his other four secretaries intimately. They are all dead now. Jan Christerson, who covered politics, became a close friend, almost my only real friend, for in a job which filled nearly every moment there was little time for human companionship. I remember him saying one evening when we were dining together after an exhausting day, "I wonder how many men there are in the world to whom their employer is only a voice."

"If I were able to have only one wish fulfilled," I said, "it would be to see Hammerbeck."

Jan smiled. "I feel the same. He has been a man of mystery from the moment he arrived in England from somewhere in Central Europe."

"He must have had good financial connections," I said.

"He had," replied Jan. "And unlimited money. He was completely straight. Within a year his name was as good as a banker's guarantee."

"And yet only Cremer knows what he looks like," I commented.

"Only Cremer." He changed the subject abruptly and we spoke of other things until we parted. But as he got into a taxi outside the restaurant he said determinedly, "I'm going to see Julius before I die."

It was some months later that I read Sharlock's letter. I was in Australia at the time, sending back weekly reports on magnetic tape by airmail to Hammerbeck. Sharlock wrote as he spoke,

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COMING ATTRACTIONS

in next month's ARGOSY

JACK COPE A haunting tale of divers like black vikings and a wild night aboard the loveliest ship in southern waters

BRIAN CLEEVE Love doesn't spring from a gift, they said . . . It was a strange romance that outraged the mountain village

GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD Vivid enthralling new story in which an old soldier's tactics achieve a dramatic rescue

JOHN SALT Swirling fog in Soho and an Italian cut-throat gang waiting for a man escaped from Dartmoor with murder in his mind . . .

There's Something for Everyone in

ARGOSY

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tersely. " I'm sorry to tell you of Jan's sudden death. He went last Thursday to make his report to Julius. Cremer says he seemed much as usual. When, half an hour after his departure, I entered the lift, he was lying huddled up on the floor. The post-mortem disclosed that he had taken poison."

I refused to believe Jan had committed suicide. He was a man in the prime of life, in good health, contented, and financially successful. The last time I saw him he had spoken of his plans for a fishing holiday in Norway. I was quite sure that there had been no thought of self-destruction in his mind.

The vacancy was filled immediately, of course; for come earthquake or hydrogen bomb, the flow of information to Julius could not be allowed to cease. But, although I liked and respected the abilities of his successors, none of them was my friend as Jan had been. In the years that followed Jan's death I juggled, on Hammerbeck's instructions, with the markets of the world. His judgment remained faultless. Money poured into the firm's banks in London, New York, and Geneva.

Sometimes I wondered what Julius' purpose could be. Did he just enjoy making money for its own sake? Cremer, too, remained an enigma. Presumably he left the flat at times for exercise, to buy clothes, or even for amusement. He must have had domestic help; but I never saw anyone else there. Meals were sent in from the exclusive Royalty Restaurant in the next building.

As I mentioned earlier, Cremer's appearance was contradictory in itself. The great muscular body resembled that of a professional strong man; the face was that of an ascetic and intellectual. His eyes were a strange flecked yellow. When he spoke, his manner was withdrawn. There was a monumental inaccessibility about him that defied approach. Only once did I catch him with—so to speak—his guard down, and then for just a brief moment.

One morning I was unwell and had barely managed to get through the daily interview with Julius. As he was completing his instructions, the arm on which I had been resting my head slipped and my hand hit the box with a thump. I heard a crackling noise in another part of the flat and looked up. Through the doorway on the right burst Cremer. He was in shirtsleeves and carrying a small cardboard carton. He went hurriedly through the door behind me, one which I had never seen open and assumed to lead to a sitting-room. I heard the latch click as he closed it firmly.

I stood for a few minutes by the open window and began to feel better. Then Cremer reappeared.

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" I trust you were not alarmed," he said, giving me a searching look.

" Has a fuse blown? " I asked.

" It was the lights in Mr. Hammerbeck's study. I'm afraid he has had a slight shock. Perhaps you will finish your report to him tomorrow? "

He came with me to the front door. As I was going down in the lift there flashed into my mind a picture of the moment when Cremer had rushed so hastily into the other room: his figure had been outlined by bright neon lighting from within.

For five years Hammerbeck Enterprises continued to grow. Julius' power and influence had become almost legendary, yet he never seemed to misapply his financial genius. I respected him as I had never respected any other man; as Christmas approached again, I felt more and more that my regard could become a warmer emotion if only I were to meet him.

How soon that meeting was to take place, I little guessed . . .

Cremer's normally pale face was grey and drawn when he opened the door to me early in the New Year.

" I think, Mr. Randall," he began; then a look of astonishment came over his face, he gave a brief, shocked cry and collapsed at my feet. His pulse still beat shallowly. Picking up the telephone, I got through to my doctor who lived not far away. He promised to come immediately.

Five minutes later he arrived and, after a short examination, rang the nearest hospital. When the ambulance came, Cremer was still alive, but his hold on life was tenuous. As they took him away, I realised I should not see him again.

My next reaction was to call Hammerbeck. I knocked on the door behind the desk. There was no reply and I knocked again loudly, urgently, calling out his name. Still no one answered. I opened the door and went in.

In the pitiless glare of the neon lighting I saw a large room, thickly carpeted, but bare of furniture. Facing me at the far end was a bank of machines under a large switchboard. But between me and the machines stood a wheelchair turned away from me. All I could see of its occupant was a motionless, hunched figure, outlined against the light. Two hands, unnaturally white and still, lay on the arms of the chair.

" Mr. Hammerbeck! " I said loudly.

There was no answer from the seated figure.

With a chill sensation at the base of my spine I approached the chair, remembering Sharlock's words: " There have been rumours that he is disfigured; that he is insane. . ."

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I walked round the chair, to look Hammerbeck in the face.

And there was nothing. Nothing but a piece of white sheeting, a crude wig, two hands made from stuffed rubber gloves. A dummy, put there to deceive any chance intruder who might look in at the door.

But where was Hammerbeck—the real Hammerbeck?

Quickly I turned and hurried to the doors—bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, a wall cupboard—Julius was not in the flat.

In a drawer of the dressing-table I found a passport. The name on the cover was Julius Hammerbeck. The photograph inside was of the man I knew as Cremer.

The bookcase on one wall was crammed with technical books and papers on electronics and kindred subjects. Among them stood a row of notebooks. I was looking at these when the bell rang. I stuffed the passport into my pocket and went to the door.

In the passage a youngster in a smart grey uniform stood with one hand on a tiered metal trolley. "Dinner from the Royalty, sir," he said. "And fit for a king."

I smiled automatically at the routine joke and gave him half a crown. "Cancel the order for meals until you hear from me," I said.

When he had gone I lifted the dish-covers; there was dinner for one. Even the sight of food was nauseating. I found a bottle of whisky in the kitchen and poured myself a drink. Then I sat down and began to read the notebooks.

They held the life history of a man of science whose single purpose had been the production of a machine to duplicate the human mind. Others had made so-called electronic brains which could store information and calculate a million times faster than man. Julius Hammerbeck had set out to build a "brain" that would think and reason without being subject to human error or emotions. His idea was that by controlling the raw material markets of the world he could bring about a stable civilisation free from economic upheavals. He began to see himself as a man with a mission, as humanity's benefactor.

The "brain" which he built he named Magister, and the last revealing words he had written in the final notebook were: "With Magister there is nothing that I cannot achieve."

To prevent the existence of Magister becoming known, as a form of protection against those who might wish to use it for selfish ends, Julius created the fictitious character of Cremer. People, he reasoned, would think that behind the catspaw, Cremer, sat the mysterious, unseen genius, Julius Hammerbeck; none would suspect that Cremer was, in fact, guardian of a much greater secret.

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When I had finished reading I knew all I shall ever know about Julius Hammerbeck.

Half an hour later the telephone rang. I picked up the receiver and listened to the night-sister's calm tones. "I regret to tell you that Mr. Cremer died a few minutes ago."

"Thank you," I answered. As I replaced the receiver, I knew that I was face to face with the problem I had feared. If I announced the death of Hammerbeck, then I should have to disclose that he had been Cremer. The secret of Magister would almost certainly become known. That contingency, against which Julius had taken such fantastic precautions, I must for a hundred reasons prevent.

I could, of course, allow Cremer's death to go on record, and let it be thought that Julius was still alive. In that case, I must take over the guardianship of Magister and become another Cremer, a hermit bound hand and foot to a machine.

I rose and walked to the door behind the desk. Why I knocked I do not know, but I did. After a second or two I opened the door and went in. The neon lighting shone shadowlessly on the bank of machines, on the wheelchair and its grotesque, faceless occupant. The switchboard bristled with coloured plugs and bulbs; on the right was a lever and above it an unlit pilot lamp. Nervously, curiously, I pulled the lever and the lamp glowed red. A motor began to throb gently and at once the machines seemed to become endowed with life. There was an almost inaudible click and the familiar sharp, meticulous voice began to speak.

"Who are you?"

"Randall," I said quietly.

"No one but Hammerbeck is allowed to enter this room." The voice was calm and even, but something in it brought gooseflesh to my skin.

"I am here because Hammerbeck is dead," I said.

Silence filled the room, but there was a feeling of disquiet in the air. I found myself trembling as I waited.

"That is impossible." The voice came sharply emphatic.

"Then Cremer is dead," I said. "Whatever name you use, it s the same man."

Abruptly the lights went out. In the darkness only the pilot lamp on the switchboard shone menacingly. Vainly I tried to release my eyes from its mesmeric glow. The red light seemed to expand until it filled my vision. I tried to turn my head, to move away, but found I could not stir. The redness was in my brain—I became part of it. And starkly, coldly, I was afraid. Magister laughed. The sound was terrifying and monstrous.

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"You cannot move, Mr. Randall. You will do exactly as I tell you. Listen."

Sweat gathered on my forehead as I strove to break the hypnotic spell.

"Since Hammerbeck is dead, you must carry out his wishes. They are that I shall be destroyed, and that no one shall ever know of my existence."

"No one does know—except myself," I answered. And then I realised what I had said.

Magister did not keep me in doubt. "Exactly, Mr. Randall. Jan Christerson knew. He came into this room while Hammerbeck was engaged elsewhere. The secret was no longer a secret, so I had to dispose of him."

"You!"

"You think I cannot kill because I am a machine? But I am not a machine, Mr. Randall. I *am* Julius Hammerbeck—an extension of his personality and his mind. Though you say he is dead, his brain lives on in me. You do not doubt that he could have killed you or had you killed? No. Then do not doubt that I shall kill you."

Though I knew now that death was closing on me, my muscles refused to respond to the frantic messages from my mind. I could only listen.

"You will go to the bedroom. In the drawer of the bed-table you will find a square box of blue capsules. Bring them back with you, and bring also a glass of water. One capsule is a fatal dose. You will return here, Mr. Randall, and you will obey, I repeat, *you will obey* my instructions.

"You will swallow one capsule. Then you will pull down the switch concealed behind the left-hand corner of the switchboard. That will destroy me. When you have done that, you will die."

I was walking out of the room and I could not stop myself. Into the bedroom, open the drawer, take the square box, fill a glass with water—those were my instructions. That is what I did. Automaton-like I returned.

As I passed the desk at which I had so often sat, the telephone bell began to ring.

The shrill, importunate summons cut into my fogbound mind and suddenly, miraculously, I was free. In a second the telephone receiver was at my ear.

A young girl's voice spilt out words anxiously.

"Roderick darling, forgive me. I shan't be able to meet you tomorrow. Something terribly important has come up." She paused. "Something terribly important. Can you hear me? Susan's sorry, awfully sorry." Her voice was pleading, fearful.

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She sounded small, appealing, and defenceless as she waited for a comforting word.

I had to keep her talking, to listen to her voice. Only by concentrating on her voice could I prevent Magister regaining power over me.

I made an interrogative grunt into the mouthpiece. I could scarcely speak.

" Don't be angry, please," begged the girl.

Her pleading was soft and beautiful, a voice to pluck the heart-strings. I felt contempt for myself as I allowed her to continue. I had to keep her talking while I sought means to save my life.

And suddenly I found it—in the little square box of capsules. They lay, innocently deadly, on a bed of cottonwool. I snatched a piece, scattering the capsules, and stuffed it into my right ear.

" Answer me please, Roddy," begged the girl; there were tears behind her voice. " Susan's sorry."

" I'm not Roderick," I said gently. " There is no Roderick here. You must have a wrong number."

I heard her draw in her breath and gulp. " And yet you let me go on talking," she said accusingly.

" I had to do it or be killed," I said. " I think you've saved my life. Please tell me who you are."

But before I finished speaking, she had hung up. With the receiver still pressed to my ear I heard faintly the sharp voice of Magister. " *Mr. Randall!* "

I dropped the receiver and swiftly plugged my left ear with the cottonwool . . .

The red light glowed danger as I walked into the other room and stood before the switchboard. Bending, I found the hidden switch and pulled it down. There was a blinding flash and, scarcely dulled by the cottonwool plugs, a whiplash of thunder. I found myself stumbling in pitch blackness across to the open door.

Next moment a flicker of flame lit the darkness and the acrid stink of fused metal and burning rubber clogged the air. Heat surged towards me like a battering-ram. I dropped down and crawled towards the kitchen. Then I was out of the back door, and staggering down the outside staircase.

Blindly, I made my way round to the entrance hall and found the night-porter punching the time-clock. He looked in amazement at my blackened dishevelment and leapt to the telephone almost before I had croaked the word, " Fire! "

Outside again, we gazed up at the flames that reached out angry fingers from the top-floor windows. By now Magister must be consumed beyond possibility of reconstruction.

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I leaned back weakly against the doorway. I was drained of strength, bone-tired, and brain-weary, but through my head sounded the pleading voice whose owner had unwittingly saved me from death.

I owe my life to a wrong number, to a girl with an angel's voice about whom I know nothing except her name, Susan—and yet the thought of her fills my mind and brain. It is as though my life—the life she has saved—has no meaning apart from her. How can I ever adequately thank her? Perhaps it is better that we remain strangers. Perhaps she will read this and forgive my letting her think that I was Roderick. Perhaps . . .

Someone has just rattled the letter-box. There is an envelope lying by the door. In a small, neat script it is addressed to J.R., Box 2170.

In a moment, when my heart has ceased its hammering, I shall pick it up.

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★ ★ ★

GEISHA DANCING

To the small music of a samisen,
Balancing your pale face and lacquered wig
Like too-heavy burdens on your child's thin neck,
You gently stamp your attitudes,
Working the air with an orange fan
That the orange lining of your sleeves
Echoes, an occasional surprise.

Your ribbed fan beats the drum of the air,
Half-closes, and is stretched
Open by a fingertip, so,
Like a bird's translucent wing
Whose springy feathers softly clatter,
Flash across your face's quiet moon,
The oblique eyes of a petted cat.

I sit and watch the mask of your face,
Trying to read in it again
The message you gave me with your eyes
When you knelt before me to serve the wine,
But find now no answering glance.
Your blank-powdered face compels me
To watch only the movements of the dance.

JAMES KIRKUP

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STAR AT THE TOP

" Where," he asked,
" where is Christmas? "

BY FAITH PRIOR

CHRISTMAS, for some obscure reason which Father Gabriel des Anges seemed too tired to seek out and explore, was very far away this year. He had moved as expectantly as always through the holy season of Advent; his prayers had risen about his sparse white tonsure like a familiar fragrance. And yet, closer than that, any real sense of Christmas had refused to come.

Father Gabriel des Anges grew more troubled as the Advent season drew to a close. Perhaps, he told himself, one should expect the lights to dim for old eyes, the heavenly voices to fade away when one is old.

When I am old, he would muse, nodding into the easy slumber of his eighty-eight years. And then, somewhere in the moment between consciousness and dreams, he would visit, although he stubbornly set his mind against it as unworthy, the Christmasses of his childhood; his knotted old fingers would clip a thousand tiny candles to a score of fragrant and phantom trees, his palms would test the heavy globes of a forgotten mountain of rare and golden oranges. And sometimes, for the brief instant of waking to the stern reality of his pallet and the cold silence of the cloister, a tear or two would creep slowly down the ancient cheek of Father Gabriel des Anges. To be a child again . . .

He would wake slowly to his own world, to his Prayer Upon Rising, to the small sounds of his brother monks in their various cells, and he would know himself to be in his true earthly home. And yet he yearned, in the drifting and sometimes confused shadows of his heart, to go back.

His sleep was not deep on the Eve of Christmas and he stirred easily, waking often. He told his beads many times over, his fingers moving painfully in the unheated air, but he could summon neither sleep nor the old elation for the eve of a most holy feast. Finally he rose stiffly from his pallet and went to the narrow high window of his cell.

A bright star shone in the eastern darkness, but how cold it was, how very far away; even while he studied it, it seemed

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suddenly obscured by distant mists. And then, quite close by, down the tracks to everywhere, a train whistled, recalling him to himself, to his duties.

He pulled on his thick woollen socks and rough shoes, sighing gently, and shook out the sleep-wrinkled folds of his habit. Now fully awake in the intense cold, he pulled the sides of his hood well down about his ears before going out into the courtyard. The deepest time of the night, he thought.

He had always loved this time best, this first waking to a new episode of praise. Now that he could no longer work in the orchards and fields in the summer or share in the heavy toils of winter, his duties were those of gatekeeper.

From his cell nearest the iron grille which was the only break in the cloister's great stone wall, he came each morning on rising. The gate itself would not be unlocked until much later, at daylight, but by custom the gatekeeper came and looked through the grille into the darkness of the world outside; for once long ago in the mother country, it was said, a man had come to the cloister gate on a bitter night seeking shelter, and he had died as morning came.

So, at the end of this Eve of Christmas, as upon every rising, Father Gabriel went to the gate.

A shadow of yellow light followed his swinging lantern across the drifts; his feet crunched in the snow and he stuffed one hand deep into the pocket of his cloak, yawning widely and emitting a great cloud of vapour which hung, frozen, in the air. A jangle of keys swung from his belt by a chain, clinking as he walked.

It was less than an hour past midnight. The deepest time of the night, he thought again. He peered out through the iron gate, his eyes turned upwards to the cold mist-shrouded star once more. How far even this . . . He turned away.

"Hey!"

It was a very small voice, from beyond and below the grille. Father Gabriel des Anges stopped in mid turn, then lifted his lantern to peer out into the dark once more.

"Hey," said the small voice again, "I'm down here."

In the circle of lanternlight stood a very small boy in a snowsuit, his feet planted wide apart in the snow. His cheeks were very red and his eyes bright with recent sleep.

"I'm cold," he said. "And I want a handkerchief."

The frosted lock screeched as the key turned, and the gate swung wide. There was no one else in the wide white road, no one at all. The child walked firmly inside, and the gate closed behind him; he stretched up a small mittened hand confidently, and together they trudged back to the monastery.

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Inside, the shuffle of many feet warned of the hour. Father Gabriel looked down at the small boy and frowned. The boy looked back at him, smiled, and with deliberation and evident satisfaction wiped his nose on his sleeve. At this Father Gabriel hastily dug his own great brown handkerchief from his pocket and offered it wordlessly.

The child looked puzzled. He expects me to ask him his name, how he came here, thought the monk. But this is the time of the Grand Silence. Never before had Holy Rule left him unprepared for a single moment.

He lifted the child to the pallet in his cell near the door, motioning to him to remain there. Then, hastily removing his cloak, he hurried down the corridor towards the murmur of Gregorian, muted by many doors. But he had not gone more than ten steps when he felt a tug at his habit.

"I want to come, too," the boy said.

Once more he led him back to the bed, shook his head, laid his finger against his lips, and hurried away. This time when the boy, following his new friend of the darkness, pattered insistently behind, Father Gabriel des Anges dared hesitate no longer; he took the child by the hand and together they scurried towards the chapel.

Slipping in silently, they sat down on the narrow hard Bench of the Infirm, next to old Father Nicolet, the only survivor of the little handful of monks who had come so long ago from their native France.

The chant rose in pure waves from the choir monks in their stalls, and the child looked with round and wondering eyes at the candles, the gold of the High Altar, the long brown shadowy rows of the lay brothers in their places. But as the chant went on and on he nodded and then slept, cushioned against Father Nicolet's soft side. If the monk was surprised to find a small sleeping boy at Matins he did not betray it by so much as a Gregorian semiquaver. And at the end of the Mass of Christmas the two old men carried the child back to Father Gabriel's cell once more; not even the whisper of many feet in the stone corridor waked him.

His own Mass and Office, the Martyrology and Holy Rule completed, Father Gabriel took his meagre frustulum of fresh bread and steaming, bitter black coffee.

Then, the Grand Silence broken at last, he reported to the Father Abbot.

"And there was no one—no indication whence the boy came?" the Abbot asked at the end of the story.

"No, Father. No one. Nothing."

The Father Abbot stroked his neat silver beard slowly. "Then

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we shall have to make inquiries. A child so young could not have come far alone."

He reached for the telephone at his elbow.

"Until some other arrangements are made he will be in your care."

I had forgotten how quietly they sleep, thought Father Gabriel. He sat at the side of the bed, waiting for the boy to wake, but it was difficult to restrain himself from whispering, touching the child perhaps to waken him.

A little flurry of excitement made him tremble, but it passed quickly, leaving Father Gabriel drowsy. He nodded, half sleeping, slipping unaware into the familiar dream of childhood once more. A homesickness in time and space overcame him. He was at the very threshold of a childhood Christmas when it began to slip away from him again, doors closing against a candle-lit tree, against familiar faces . . .

He woke suddenly. The child on the pallet was sitting up, looking about curiously.

"They said I would be at my grandma's when I woke up."

"Did they?"

The boy nodded solemnly. "And they said when I woke up it would be Christmas."

"Then they were right. It is Christmas."

The boy looked about the bare cell. "Where?" he asked. "Where is Christmas?"

Where indeed? echoed Father Gabriel, but he nodded reassuringly. "Here. Everywhere, all over the world. It's Christmas everywhere."

The boy shook his head slowly.

"At home, our Christmas always has a star at the very top. As high as I can see. Doesn't your Christmas have a star?"

Father Gabriel des Anges smiled wistfully. "No. Not any more. Christmas is not like that here . . ."

The monastery kitchen was warm with the steam of the great cooking pots, the sweet hot smell of baking bread.

"My name is Johnny," the boy announced suddenly, banging his heels against the tall stool where he perched. A rim of foam clung to his upper lip when he raised it from the cup of milk. "What's yours?"

"Gabriel des Anges."

"That's a big word. What does it mean?"

"Gabriel of the Angels."

"Are you an angel?"

"No."

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" But your name is an angel."

" Well, that's true, but—"

" I'll call you Father Angel. That's easier to say."

He finished his milk and slipped from the stool. " Is it still Christmas?" he asked.

" Yes," Father Angel said. " It's still Christmas."

" But my mother promised I'd be at my grandma's for Christmas. She had to go to the hospital—all of a sudden—and my daddy telephoned Grandma and she said they'd be there when I got off the train and that it would be Christmas." He paused. " *Her* Christmas has a star at the top, too," he added accusingly.

How to tell a small boy that Christmas can come as well in silence and in prayer, without laughter and oranges? Without stars.

They spent the morning visiting. They visited the stable and the piggery, and the newborn calves in the dairy barn. Brother Laurent took Johnny by the hand among the pheasants in their pens, and Brother Richard lifted him on to an enormous draught horse whose broad back shone like a polished table. But nowhere —nowhere at all did they find Christmas.

As they left the refectory after the midday meal the Abbot beckoned Father Angel aside.

" The authorities have the story," he said. " The boy's mother was rushed to the hospital yesterday and he was put on a train to go to his grandparents. The conductor was keeping an eye on him—he says he was sleeping soundly the last time he looked. Just down the road from here they had a heated axle and were stopped for half an hour or so. Apparently the boy simply got off by himself and wandered away unseen by anyone. The police have been scouring the roads since they discovered he was missing. I have talked with the grandparents, and they are driving here to get him; they'll be here by evening. Will he be content until then, do you think? "

Father Angel nodded. " Yes, Father. He is content. That is, he does not cry. But about Christmas—he is somehow afraid that he has lost Christmas." Father Angel hesitated. " It is a little sad to see, Father." He felt suddenly very akin to the small boy.

It was not until he lay down for an afternoon nap that Johnny cried. He knew now that his grandparents were coming, that they would be there at night.

" Will it be dark when they come? " he asked.

Yes, most certainly it would be dark, now in December, when the night came soon. It was then that he began to cry.

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"You're not afraid of the dark?" Father Angel asked.

The boy wiped his cheek with the back of his hand, and shook his head.

"Then what is it, child?"

"It's Christmas." He drew his sleeve across his eyes. "To-night Christmas will be all over." He lay down and a few tears escaped from beneath his closed eyelids, but he said no more, and presently he slept.

As soon as the Office of Christmas was completed, Father Angel presented himself once more, humbly, to the Abbot. Humbly, because he wished so much to have his request granted. And a little afraid, for his was a daring, an almost pagan plan. But when he left, there was a merriness in Father Angel's eyes.

And when Johnny awoke, all was complete.

In the centre of the refectory, a little hemlock tree stood bravely. Father Hilary, the librarian, had produced some scarlet cords for its branches, and fashioned from the gold flyleaf of a book a bright paper star for the very top. There were oranges and apples tied here and there, and a flurry of cards from the Father Abbot's desk. Brother Richard brought sleighbells from the stable and rang them merrily all the way from Father Angel's cell to the room where Christmas waited.

And there were gifts! A pot of paste and some coloured papers. A new white handkerchief—"As big as my daddy's," Johnny said. A box of butternuts from Father Michel's storeroom, and a little picture of the Nativity cut from a calendar. And up from the barns came the brother herdsman with the finest gift of all—a black kitten with an enchanting face and sky-blue eyes.

From the depths of the chest in his cell Father Claude produced an old harmonica, and they played Blindman's Buff and London Bridge, and Johnny sang them a song about a snowman who ran away, and they applauded and laughed because it was Christmas and there was a child among them.

Then it was dark, and the chimes rang for Vespers. Johnny sat once more between Father Nicolet and Father Angel on the Bench of the Infirm, but this time he did not sleep. He listened to the soaring notes of the choir monks as he snuggled the sleeping kitten close to him; his eyes were bright as reflected candles, and it seemed to him that the voice of Father Angel sang out most joyously of all.

His grandparents waited in the Abbot's office. His grandmother brushed tears from her eyes, and his grandfather hugged him very hard.

Then the Abbot and Father Angel held his gifts as he was snugged into his snowsuit once more.

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He took the Nativity picture first. "This," he told his grandmother solemnly, "is Christmas." He smiled at Father Angel as though there were a special understanding between them. "This is Christmas. And see—it has a star at the very top, too."

They walked to the door together, and the Abbot carefully handed Johnny the black kitten. "Come again," he said. "Do not run away, but come again, little one."

Father Angel was the last to see them go.

He closed the iron gates behind them and turned the key slowly, watching through the grille until the car drove away into the darkness. Then he turned back to the open door of the monastery, but before he entered his eyes sought once more the early stars. As high as I can see . . . It seemed to Father Angel that a certain one in the East had never shone so brightly.

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MARCHPANE AND SUCKETS

Add a fillip to the post-pudding wit of your dinner-guests with our batch of old world who-wot-what testers. Suckets were Elizabethan sweets, marchpane is marzipan, and a fillip bears no relation to a philippina, or penalty kiss administerable to your mother-in-law for each wrong answer.
Check these on page 107.

1. *The Christmas tree in Trafalgar Square—how many have there been? Who gives them?*
2. *O Tannenbaum, wie grün sind deine Blätter! We don't know about Christmas trees, but how many leaves should you say there were on the average large elm?*
3. *What is a chicken of St. Nicholas (or chick of St. Nick)?*
4. *Would you know where to find: a. Christmas Island;*
   b. Goose Creek; d. Cock Hill;
   c. Gander Bay; e. the River Duck?
5. *What low type should be boiled with his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his heart?*
6. *"I've got a shoe-nut here. Fetch me a shoe-horn to open it, boy." Whose uncle said this once every year on Christmas Day?*
7. *Who eats The Baddeley Cake on Twelfth Night? Where?*
8. *He solved his Christmas-present problem by writing "and William" after the greetings on one parcel in each pile on the breakfast table. Who was this frugal character?*

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Pray you dutifully prime
Your native chime, ye ringers;
May you beautifully rhyme
Your Evetime Song, ye singers:
" Gloria in excelsis Deo! "

Carol, Ding Dong Merrily on High

Full Peal

The bells gave tongue: Gaude, Sabaoth, John, Jericho, Jubilee, Dimity, Batty Thomas and Tailor Paul, rioting and exulting high up in the dark tower, wide mouths rising and falling, brazen tongues clamouring, huge wheels turning to the dance of the leaping ropes. Tin tan din dan bim bam bom bo—tan tin din dan bam bim bo bom—tin tan dan din bim bam bom bo—tan tin dan din bam bim bo bom—tan dan tin bam din bo bim bom—every bell in her place striking tuneably, hunting up, hunting down, dodging, snapping, laying her blows behind, making her thirds and fourths, working down to lead the dance again.

Out over the flat, white wastes of fen, over the spear-straight, steel-dark dykes and the wind-bent, groaning poplar trees, bursting from the snow-choked louvres of the belfry, whirled away southward and westward in gusty blasts of clamour to the sleeping counties went the music of the bells—little Gaude, silver Sabaoth, strong John and Jericho, glad Jubilee, sweet Dimity and old Batty Thomas, with great Tailor Paul bawling and striding like a giant in the midst of them.

Up and down went the shadows of the ringers upon the walls, up and down went the scarlet sallies flickering roofwards and floorwards, and up and down, hunting in their courses, went the bells of Fenchurch St. Paul.

DOROTHY L. SAYERS, *The Nine Tailors*

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Brief, on a flying night
From the shaken tower,
A flock of bells take flight
And go with the hour.

Like birds from the cote to the gales,
Abrupt—O Hark!
A fleet of bells set sails,
And go to the dark.

Sudden the cold airs swing,
Alone, aloud,
A verse of bells takes wing
And flies with the cloud.

ALICE MEYNELL, *Chimes*

There were twenty tiny candles on the small Christmas tree that stood in the centre of the tea-table. The room seemed full of stars and all the stars were singing, like those that sang to the young-eyed cherubim when Lorenzo and Jessica sat on the bank where the moonlight slept . . . At least Henrietta thought they sang but perhaps what she heard were the bells ringing for the evensong that no one had time to go to on Christmas Day because of the cake having to be cut.

ELIZABETH GOUDGE, *A City of Bells*

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the frosty light:
The year is dying in the night;
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die . . .

Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.

ALFRED TENNYSON, *In Memoriam*

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Six-Part Peal

Oh, the bonny Christchurch Bells,
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6;
They sound so wondrous great
So woundy sweet,
And they trowl so merrily, merrily.

HENRY ALDRICH, *Christchurch Bells*, 1673

Grandsire Triples

" Dear sweetheart and life's love, I am going to ring the bells with my own hands, to show how glad I am for you, and for the child, and for our good life together."

. . . Then the King flew from rope to rope, pulling lustily, and from above, the bells answered in their own clear beautiful voices. " *Ring-a-ring-a-ring-a-ring-a-ring! Ring, bell!*
A little baby comes on earth to dwell. Ring, bell!
Ring, bell! Joy, bell! Love, bell!
Ring! "

E. NESBIT

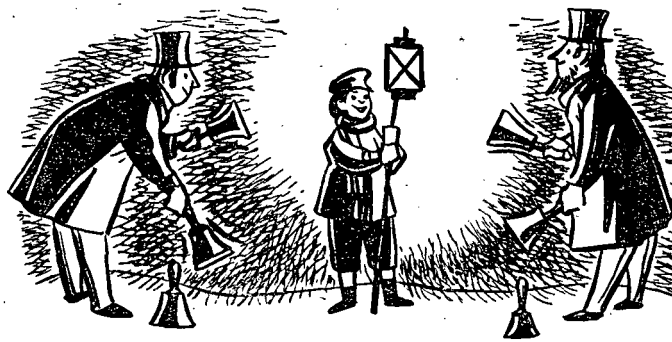
Stedman's Double

What Musick is there that compar'd may be
To well-tun'd Bells enchanting melody!

FABIAN STEDMAN, *Tintinnalogia*, 1671

The hand-bells belonging to the parish have been repaired. The only thing now wanted is three or four more bells, before they can play much variety. A hint to the wise is sufficient.

Home Words, Petworth Parish Magazine, 1884



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RED CARPET TREATMENT

The whole forty feet of it were impatient to unroll

BY GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD

TO a tired American who on her second day in England had just missed her train back to London and had two hours to wait for another, it had looked all that a small hotel ought to be—green and white, built in the days before Stanborough had become an industrial town, with a front door opening on a quiet courtyard flanked by eighteenth-century houses.

Inside, however, it was utterly without welcome. Two old ladies were knitting on a sofa. A retired military man—at a guess—was asleep in front of an inadequate electric fire. A party of three men in a corner had busy glasses and ashtrays in front of them, but seemed affected by the general hush.

She just sat. Nobody paid any attention to her. It was nearly as cold as the railway junction. After a while the uncompromising back of the manageress was to be seen behind the glass of the combined bar and office at the end of the lounge.

"Three doubles, please!"

The manageress carried a tray of whiskies over to the three men. She showed exemplary patience at the disturbance.

"Can I have some dinner?" Janet asked as she passed.

"I am sorry, dinner is finished."

"A sandwich will do."

"I am sorry, we do not serve food in the lounge to non-residents." The creature vanished among its account books and bottles.

Janet felt that the universe had run down and time had ceased. The two old ladies tottered off to bed. The major woke himself up with a complicated snore, looked anxiously round the lounge, and marched.

The three men were left, enjoying themselves decorously over drinks. Their quietness annoyed her. If they couldn't be more lively after those large doses of alcohol, when could they be? They were tall, dressed in good tweeds, and in their thirties.

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All looked exasperatingly alike, though she had to admit that they weren't. One was clean-shaven, one had a dark moustache, and the third a fair moustache.

They had looked up and smiled at her encounter with that intolerable woman, but Janet had not responded. A minute later she decided that the smiles were sympathetic, but it was too late. They ignored her politely—all except fair moustache, of whose eyes she was occasionally aware.

Twenty interminable minutes passed. An unshaven porter in dirty shirt and green baize apron put his head through the bar hatch and said, "Time, gentlemen, please!"

Dark moustache looked at his watch. "Nonsense—it's not half past ten yet! And this lady has been waiting half an hour to be served."

"The missus says it's time," replied the porter.

He crashed down the bar hatch with the finality of a guillotine and disappeared.

Janet got up, thankful that the spell which had condemned her to see and not be seen was broken. The three men also rose.

"Madam," said fair moustache, "I can only hope that you have graced this country long enough to know that all our hotels are not like this."

"I guess there are hell holes everywhere," Janet replied a little too emphatically, and then smiled.

They stood before her with such an air of concern and apology. They swayed very gently like benevolent elephants, but there was nothing else in speech or manner to suggest that the order of three doubles had been repeated for most of the evening.

"Mike," asked clean-shaven, "the red carpet?"

"Indubi-dubitably, Jim," answered Mike-fair-moustache. "The lady has been humiliated, and she shall leave this hell hole, as she so rightly described it, with befitting dignity."

Forty feet of bright crimson carpet ran from the front door across the lounge, past the bar hatch and down a passage. Jim and Mike walked straight out of the door with the leading edge. Dark moustache reluctantly followed with the rear end as if he was holding up a bride's train. They spread the carpet down the steps and across the courtyard.

Their attitudes respectfully suggested Sir Walter Raleigh and his cloak. She hesitated. But there was no other way of leaving the hotel. She walked the length of the carpet disapprovingly, then giggled and swept the three a graceful curtsy.

The front door slammed.

"Glad to get rid of us even if it costs 'em a carpet, Noll," said the clean-shaven Jim.

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"You and Mike—" began Noll-dark-moustache severely.

He was interrupted by an inviting hiss from the level of the pavement. The hoarse whisper of that unspeakable porter came from a grating under the steps.

"Neat! Very neat! I ain't seen nothink, see? I was down 'ere with the furnace, see? You got two minutes before she comes back to check the bar takin's. We could nick 'alf the pub if you and me gets together. Ask for Len at Bob's Pull-in Caff."

"This," said Mike, staring at the shut door, "comes under the heading of Things-which-were-funny-at-the-time."

"But we can't run away like a bunch of juvenile delinquents," Noll protested. "Ring the bell and put it back."

"Ring, hell! How long is it going to take that manageress to see a joke? And with Len swearing blind that he stopped us getting away with it, which he would—"

"J.P. accused of stealing carpet," said Noll, in a voice which quoted headlines.

"What's a J.P.?" Janet asked.

"I am—and it's a Justice of the Peace."

"Roll it up and leave it in the backyard," Mike proposed.

Between the silent houses which lined the court was a narrow passage. The three rolled up the carpet with one hearty shove, carried it through the alley, and put it in the back of a parked station wagon.

"Hop in!" Mike invited Janet. "You're too conspicuous."

"I don't see how, or that it matters."

"Hair auburn. Complexion pale. Dressed in grey-green suit. Height five foot seven. Build slight. Speaks with American accent, possibly assumed. Suspected alias, Carpet Kate."

Janet, sounding to herself too impeccably formal, replied that her name was Janet Morland and that she was catching the eleven-five back to London.

"You shall. Noll, we must go round two corners and think this out."

"Now, I'd better introduce your fellow criminals," said Noll as the car rolled away. "I am Oliver Cromwell. Can't help it. I really am. Descended direct from the same family. This is Jim Blaize, Clerk to the Justices. I have warned him before not to nick carpets in bars where they aren't used to him. And this party with the ginger moustache is Michael Lanchester. He is a wicked squire and farms. We're all from the next county and nobody knows us here in Stanborough—or I'd go straight to the police station and fix this silly business."

"It wouldn't be easy to keep it quiet even at home," Mike Lanchester remarked.

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"It would," said Jim. "I've told that local reporter of ours that if he doesn't leave the pair of us out of his news it's going to be justifiable homicide when I sit on his body."

Janet froze. She was in a strange country and she had been there only thirty-six hours. She had always heard that English country gentry were the most correct of human beings with the possible exception of Chinese mandarins. Still, homicide . . .

"I forgot to mention that Jim is also the Coroner," said Oliver Cromwell.

At the back of the hotel was a high blank wall with one small door in it. On the opposite side of the street were no houses, only locked garages, more walls, and a builder's yard. Janet was relieved. In such favourable circumstances even three lunatics could return a carpet.

"All we have to do," said Noll, "is to stand on the roof of Mike's car, pass the carpet up to a chap on the wall, and pitch it over. I'll just go up and see where it will fall."

He climbed from the car on to the coping of the wall.

"There's a lean-to shed on this side," he reported. "If we roll the carpet down the slates it will land right in front of the hotel's back door. The old girl can't miss it."

He hunched himself along the wall, and stood up to get a better view of a lighted window.

"She has telephoned the cops already," he whispered. "I can see 'em in there. Smart police force in Stanborough! It's a curious thing," he added confidingly to Janet, "I've no head for heights and I'd never have dared to stand on this wall in daylight. Yet here I am at night, steady as a rock with absolute—"

The rending crash was succeeded by a trickle of falling slates and an instant's silence. Then action broke out all along the front. A whistle blew. Two doors slammed in the hotel. There was a splintering explosion as Noll showed he was still alive by knocking out some window he couldn't open. Mike Lanchester started the car. The Justice of the Peace shot out of the door in the wall covered with cobwebs and plaster.

"Damn it, I went through the roof!" he said.

A second later they were cruising innocently through the well-lit streets.

"The next thing is to put Miss Morland on her train," Mike said firmly, "before she has to send for her consul to bail her out."

He drove very carefully down a long street of little red-brick houses until the lights of the station were a hundred yards ahead.

"Stop!" Janet ordered, and nearly went through the wind-screen.

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" Sorry, I thought you'd seen a bicyclist without a rear light."

" I just remembered that I told the hotel female I was waiting for a train," she explained.

" Oh, the police won't believe that! " said Jim Blaize. " They'll think it was your cover story."

" One never knows what they will or won't believe," Noll warned, gloomily fishing inside his shirt for bits of slate. " When they stopped that car with all Mike's silver from the manor in it, they waved the driver on again because he said his mother was ill."

" I'll go with her," said Mike, taking immediate charge.

Janet liked the proprietary air with which he accompanied her to the station as if he was seeing off a guest.

" This sort of thing always happens as soon as one arrives in a foreign country or not at all," he said. " I wish we could have met more formally."

She responded at once. " I'll never forgive you if you don't write to me care of the consulate and tell me what happens."

" You'll probably see it in tomorrow's evening paper anyway. Well, here we are."

They entered the booking hall. By the ticket collector's box, stolidly examining the passengers for London, were two constables.

" Turn round quietly as if we had just been checking the time-tables and walk straight back to the car! " Mike whispered. " They haven't spotted us yet."

All went well while they crossed the station yard. Then they heard a shout of " Hey! "

" Don't look round! Pretend it can't possibly be meant for us."

But it was. Janet gave a hitch to her pencil skirt and ran. The car was already turned and the door open. They beat the constables to it by three seconds.

" That is the end," Mike Lanchester said, as they shot off into a network of obscure streets. " Even if we get clear they can trace the car to me."

Jim remarked cheerfully that they had dealt with the evidence while the two were away. A piece of sacking hanging out from the boot had got tied round the rear number plate, and Noll had decorated the front with engine oil.

" But it's all very well," Noll said. " I'm going to surrender and explain as best I can. We can't get clear without some tricky driving and we are none of us sober enough. Slow and cautious, yes. Fast, no. I gave a bloke three months last week for thinking he could drive because he could still talk."

Janet approved. If they had to stand in the dock while their story was telephoned through to eager sub-editors it was just

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too bad, but they deserved it. Still, it did seem specially hard on Mike who wasn't a magistrate or a coroner or anything else. And why specially? she asked herself. Oh well!

"I shall drive," she said. "I've been in rallies, and I've got my American driving licence."

"I'm not sure if it's good here unless you register it. But that," Noll added hopefully, "is a minor crime."

"Where to?" she insisted.

"The first cop who will believe us. And he's thirty miles away. And we daren't take any of the main routes out of town."

"It looks as if we could get on to the Gloucester road by going down past the gasworks and along a track," said the Coroner, studying the map.

To judge by the protests from the other two, Jim Blaize was famous for optimistic short cuts. But they could suggest nothing better.

"To the gasworks, Kate, if I can find 'em," Mike said. "And we drive on the left of the road."

The gasworks were complicated by the presence of a brewery and a flour mill. All the lanes between them ended at gates or loading bays.

"I think this must be right," said Jim Blaize at last, pointing to a narrow cinder track across a marshy, derelict field.

Noll pointed out that if it was wrong they could never turn round.

"We could always set fire to Mike's car and walk."

"But what about the carpet?" Noll asked.

"I'd forgotten the carpet."

Janet drove slowly ahead, the wheels crunching over cinders. Water seemed to be multiplying on all sides. They came to a barrier of iron railings with a gate only half shut.

"Bit of luck!" Jim exclaimed, getting out to open it. "If there's a gate at the other end, we're away!"

As she passed through, the headlights shone on a maze of tanks and ponds connected by batteries of pipes. It was evidently the town waterworks or sewage farm. Probably both, she reflected bad-temperedly. And did they let off first offenders in this country or just allow them to use lipstick after the first month inside?

Mike seemed instinctively to realise her sudden panic. "You're a lovely driver," he said. "This track seems to have been made for two wheelbarrows to pass in safety."

"Wheelbarrows don't skid," Janet answered, hastily correcting another where the cinders had worn to dust and solidified the mud.

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The gate at the far end was chained and padlocked. There was no passing it without a hacksaw, and no room to turn; but the track, with a ditch on both sides, curved round to follow the fence. It seemed to be a ring road circling the plant.

At the next corner the ditches disappeared and the navigable area opened out, sloping up to a sludge tank on the left and down to level grass on the right. It suggested the banking on a miniature race track.

Janet accelerated slightly round the bend and was instantly out of control. She stopped with one rear wheel balanced uncertainly on the edge of the tank.

"Skating rink," said Mike Lanchester, getting out to inspect the surface. "The tank has been leaking, and that nice tempting surface is two inches of mud over smooth stone. The grass is all right if you take it steady."

The three men got out and bounced the rear end of the car down the slope.

The ring road took them back again to the entrance. Just as they were about to pass through and return to the gasworks a purposeful car entered the track at the town end. It could only be the police.

"Had to expect it with our lights wandering about the low ground like a lot of blasted pixies!" Noll groaned. "Now you, dear Carpet Kate, run like hell, climb the fence, find a respectable-looking driver on the Gloucester road and vanish! We shall deny all knowledge of you."

Janet prepared to do so. She wasn't going to be arrested, probably brutally, in a sewage farm just for mixing with coroners and squires. Didn't they run the damn police, anyway? And if they thought of their public positions instead of behaving like a lot of port-soaked bucks—but that was mean. And it was narrow-minded to be more afraid of English gaols than American. She was not going to desert them. And with the decision came inspiration.

"Noll, I like to think this is a waterworks," she said. "But whatever it is, we leave it in company. Just you remember your great ancestor, because the Lord has delivered them into our hands or whatever it wasn't he said."

As the car came bounding through the gate she fled away in front. The police could certainly drive, even on an eight-foot-wide cinder track, but she had been over it before and they had not. At the padlocked gate she hesitated an instant as if to confirm that it was shut, and then shot off by the ring road with the police car ten yards behind.

On the curve where the track widened Janet took the grass.

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The police, seeing a chance to pass and get in front, swung round the top of the banking. There was a black fountain of sludge as they skidded slap over the edge into the tank.

A roar of delight went up from the three men. They waved out of the windows. Janet, grinning happily to herself, kept on course for the open gate and the gasworks.

"Stop!" the Coroner ordered. "Carpet Kate, we are going to kiss you."

They did.

She noticed that Mike Lanchester was a little shy about it.

"However did you think of it?" Noll asked.

"Just uninhibited," Janet replied. "I guess I haven't your British respect for the police."

"Well, it's total war now. We'll have the whole county out after us. Jim, can they use their radio with the car on its side and the antenna under—er—water?"

"Not for some minutes, anyway."

"There's only one safe place in this town where we are never interrupted," said Mike. "Behind that damned hotel! And it's the last place they're going to look for us."

They reached the back alley without passing a cop, switched off the lights, and lit cigarettes.

Noll produced a bottle of whisky. "Medical stores," he said. "Badly needed."

"A stiff one for Carpet Kate," Mike prescribed, "and none for me. I'm cold sober now and I'll take over. There's likely to be a long hard chase, and we don't want her involved."

Janet accepted her stiff one, for she felt all loose muscles beginning to tremble with the reaction. Her past moments of panic seemed silly. Of course they could have got her out of any serious trouble. But now, as Noll had said, it was total war. Whatever the police chose to swear after that sludge tank, she couldn't blame them. She was thankful to hand over responsibility for her future to Mike.

He wrapped Janet in a rug and earnestly discussed with her the different traffic laws of England and the State of New York. The Coroner and Noll quite unconsciously lowered the level of the bottle and at intervals patrolled the two ends of the street.

"They must think we have left town by now," said Jim after an hour.

"If we keep to the side roads we should be all right," Noll agreed. "So we'll just return the carpet and go."

There was a general protest at Noll's exaggerated sense of duty.

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"Nonsense!" he said. "And it would be much safer than putting on a false beard and sending the thing back by rail. They forgot to lock the door in the wall here."

It was true. The massive cylinder of carpet was cautiously carried into the yard and dropped.

"Better put it under cover," Noll advised. "It has rained every night since the end of April."

There was no cover handy. The shed through which Oliver Cromwell, J.P., had exploded was surrounded by too much debris for quiet movement.

Jim tried the handle of the hotel's back door. That, too, had been forgotten in the excitement.

"Why not lay it back in the lounge exactly as we found it?" he suggested. "That will fox the old girl. She'll think she dreamt it all."

To Janet's horror Mike Lanchester's fancy also seemed to be tickled by the idea—but on condition that he himself went inside first to report whether the scheme was sane and practical.

He was back within a minute.

"No snags," he said. "Two steps up and we're in the passage leading to the lounge. Unroll from this end, and the job's done!"

There was a soft thud as they negotiated the steps. Janet held her breath. No sound came from the sleeping hotel.

But now the carpet, compressed by an evening of idle travel, took command. The forty feet of it were impatient to unroll. As soon as it had been deposited at the back of the passage and encouraged with a gentle push it gathered speed, making a bee-line for the lounge and the front door.

The width filled the passage so that it was impossible to get in front and stop it. All right if it continued straight, disastrous if it didn't. Knick-knacks and spindle tables were all over the place. Jim Blaize hurdled the roll, tripped as it flicked him across the back of the knees, but still managed to fall with the silence of long practice in juvenile delinquency.

The last yard of carpet slapped into position opposite the front door. Mike patted down a wrinkle in the middle and stepped back to admire their joint handiwork. A heavy wrought-iron standard lamp immediately behind him tottered, avoided his grasp, and crashed through the glass partition of the bar.

Upstairs someone screamed. Lights in the lounge suddenly blazed. As the four shot out of the back door and across the yard a large piece of crockery hurled from an upstairs window burst on the stone paving. The car leapt out of the alley and then rolled more sedately through back streets to avoid suspicion.

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"This is the end," Noll declared. "Can anyone think of any believable explanation when we're accused of coming back to pinch liquor from the bar?"

"If you had only been drinking, Mike, you'd have been more careful," said Jim reproachfully.

Janet silently agreed and realised that she had accepted English logic. She knew exactly what Jim meant.

"Well, we're all right for the present," Noll said, as soon as they were clear of houses and heading north along by-roads.

"Don't count on it!" Mike muttered, driving in a fury of concentration. "We passed a cop on the beat. He was too late for action but he recognised the car. We'll double back south here and make for home."

Janet dozed, her eyes tired by the continual flicking past of white hawthorn blossom in the hedgerows. At intervals they stopped to consult map and signposts. Then Mike seemed to be in his own country and was twisting from village to village with confidence. "Once across the main road, and we're safe," he said. "Oh, ye gods!"

At the junction, tucked away under trees, was a black police car. By the time Mike had roared two hundred yards down the main road and screeched right into a lane which looked as if it led nowhere, the police were in hot pursuit.

Hidden by two corners he shot into a farmyard and round the back of a barn. The police car went straight on. Janet waited for the noise to die away. It did not. The car was turning.

"Can't shake 'em off!" Mike cursed. "When they don't see my lights they know I've gone to earth. And I daren't drive without till we have a reasonable lead."

He raced back to the main road, trying sheer speed in the hope of getting away while the police were still in the lane, but there was no wood or valley to hide the gleam of the headlights.

A car ahead laid a false trail for them. Mike pulled into a side turning and watched the police shoot past. "That gives us a minute till they find out it isn't us," he said. "Noll, have you fished up as far as Norton Bridge?"

"Lots of times. I don't suppose they'll ever allow me on their water again after this."

"What's the bottom like?"

"Gravel. Why?"

"You'll see." He turned and tore back up the main road. But the police car was deadly fast, and its lights were already on their tail when he swung left and put on a brilliant burst of speed over tight, continual curves.

Janet saw the little river ahead and thought he had gone crazy.

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He switched off his lights and, instead of crossing the bridge, bumped down an old paved track to the side of it. He entered the water and turned downstream, pushing a two-foot wave in front of him. Under the bridge he stopped. The police roared over, and on out of sight and hearing.

"I thought it might work if the bottom was hard," he said. "No one would notice the track down to the old ford unless he knew it was there. I'll have that drink now, Noll, if there's any left."

Janet's violent introduction to the eccentricities of England was succeeded by a sleepy delight as the May dawn slowly made love to her. It was heaven to sit in a boat—she couldn't always be remembering it was a station wagon—conscious of this improbable and attractive Mike Lanchester while the clear stream rippled past and the solid green of the banks, dense and mysterious as jungle, was framed by the arch of the bridge. An otter arrowed upstream and investigated with nose and whiskers the curious obstruction in its fishing ground.

Just before sunrise the three men got out, cleaned the number plates, and washed the car to a state of sturdy innocence.

"Now then," said Mike, "will she start?" She did. The Coroner went up to the bridge to signal if any traffic came in sight. The Justice of the Peace stood by the bonnet ready to heave. The squire reversed back to the ford and on to the road.

"We had better split up now in case of accidents," Mike proposed. "You and Jim can easily walk home from here."

"It's a bit far for Miss Morland," Noll replied, suddenly becoming formal on the edge of his own country.

"She's coming back to the manor with me. It's obvious that she must take her bath and breakfast with the only bachelor. Your wives are angels of understanding, but turning up for breakfast with an incoherent story and a devastatingly attractive American—"

"He's right," said Janet hastily. "I mean—about the explaining."

"Well, I can leave you in Mike's hands with absolute confidence," Noll assured her.

Janet replied that of course he could, and rebuked herself for a slight sense of disappointment.

"Now, we'll fix her up so that she doesn't answer the police description. A scarf right over the hair. Jim's duffel coat. And there you are! Anyone would assume that her hair was dark. She has the innocent little madonna face which goes with it. Bring her over to lunch, Mike, and we'll celebrate!"

The two said good-bye and strolled off up the road.

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"Is it far to the manor?" Janet asked.

"About five miles. But I'm going round through the lanes. We still don't want to answer questions."

She could see by the villages and their church towers, which were always off to the right or left, that he was skilfully avoiding early risers. At last they emerged from desolate little roads, where gates had to be opened and shut, on to a straight highway.

"Now," he said, "two minutes of this and we're home!"

The car was just gathering speed when a constable leapt out of the hedge ahead and stationed himself bravely and majestically in the middle of the road with upraised hand.

"Oh, it's you, sir!" he said, disappointed. "Thought I'd got 'em!"

"Who did you think it was, Tompkins?" Mike asked. "What's the trouble?"

"Nasty business up in Stanborough last night, sir. Police from both counties on the job. They chased a car of the same make as yours and lost it around Norton Bridge."

"Any description?"

"Not much good. Three well-dressed men and a woman—" he consulted his notes— "American, good-looking, slim build, 'air red—"

"Sounds attractive," Mike interrupted. "I'm just giving Miss Morland a lift back from London. Rather a late theatre party, I'm afraid."

"It *was* from London, if you don't mind my asking? She didn't stop you and beg a lift and you, bein' always good-'earted, guv it?"

"Good lord, no! Miss Morland is an old friend."

The constable, in spite of his air of deference, had his eyes too firmly fixed on Janet. She had to say something. She drew a deep breath and produced a magnificent English accent.

"Oh, darling!" she exclaimed to Mike with a bored laugh. "How really too absurd!"

"Well, good morning, sir," said the constable. "Time we both 'ad our breakfast."

He recovered his bicycle from the hedge and rode away.

"Splendid!" Mike told her. "Splendid! But the 'darling' was altogether too stagy. We must practise that. Now look me straight in the eyes and say it again." © Geoffrey Household 1959

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GONE WITH THE WIND

When a big-game hunter disappears, something he disagreed with ate him.

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BY JOHN COLLIER

THOSE who have seen the *Zenobia*, or seen even her picture in books on sailing, may be impolite enough to wonder how I came to be so specially friendly with Glenway Abbott, owner of a three-masted schooner which is certainly among the dozen, perhaps among the half-dozen most famous of the great yachts of the world.

Such people should realise that, though I may lack wealth and grace and charm, I do so in a special and superior way. Moreover, in spite of the glorious *Zenobia* and the impressive associations of his name, Glenway Abbott's mode of life was far from sophisticated or luxurious.

His income, though still very large, was only just large enough to pay for her enormous upkeep and her numerous crew.

Therefore if the word yacht suggests music, ladies, awnings, white-jacketed stewards, caviare, and champagne, the suggestion is altogether misleading. The only music was the wind in the rigging;

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there were no ladies; the solitary steward wore no jacket, and the crew wore no shirts either. They were all natives of different parts of the Pacific with different complexions and different tongues.

Anyway, every man on board knew his job. It was a pity that the cook's job was all too often only the opening of tins of frankfurters or baked beans. This was not so much due to frugality as to that gastronomical absentmindedness often found linked with honesty, teeth and, especially, with devotion to a cause.

Glenway was devoted to a cause, and so was the *Zenobia*. All these great yachts are, of course, capable of ocean cruising; this one was used for it, and for nothing else at all. She was used and hard-used and, though as clean as a pin, she was by no means as shiny. On the horizon she looked like a cloud; at her mooring like a swan, to the poetically minded—or to the materialistic, like a floating palace. But as soon as you stepped aboard she had more the appearance of something sent out by an oceanographical institute. All manner of oddly-shaped nets and trawls and scoops were hung, or spread, or stowed around her deck.

On either side of the foremast there were two objects on pedestals, shoulder high, and made of that ugly grey, rust-resisting alloy which was used everywhere on this boat in place of brass or chromium. These objects were not ventilators. They had rotating tops; these tops were hooded or cowled, or whatever you call it, and closely shuttered against the salty spray. If you turned one of the tops towards you, slid open the shutter, and looked inside, you would find yourself being looked back at, quietly, by the darkly gleaming eye of a movie camera.

Up in the bows there was a bulky object lashed down under quickly removable canvas. This was a searchlight. Long chests, seated high, almost as high as the low gunwale into which they were built, contained rockets and flares. Glenway was hoping to photograph something which he believed might be nocturnal in its habits. He thought that otherwise, being a very large, noticeable creature, and being a reptile, and breathing air, it would have been seen more often by daylight.

Glenway, in a word, was looking for the sea serpent. As he detested the sensational newspaper stories and the tiresome jokes associated with the term, he preferred to think of it as a *large marine saurian*.

People all over the Pacific knew of Glenway's quest. Though tactful about it they made it all too clear that they thought him a crank and perhaps a zany because he believed in such a creature.

Now I am of sceptical nature in most matters, but I am strongly inclined to suspend disbelief when it comes to a large marine saurian. Without at least the possibility of such a creature, it seems to me that the world would be a poor and a narrow place. Glenway perceived this at our very first meeting, and it was the reason for at least the beginning of our friendship.

" I shall find it sooner or later," said he, when first we debated the question, " because I know where to look."

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Glenway had taken all the best authenticated reports, and he had an outline drawn up from each of them. Almost all these reports, from whatever corner of the world they may come, describe more or less the same sort of creature, so he had no trouble in getting a composite picture made by an expert hand. This, of course, showed a reptile of the plesiosaurus type, but very much larger than any of the fossil plesiosauri, being only a few inches under eighty feet in length. But here there was a snag.

Glenway had every reason to know what each extra foot on the length of a yacht adds to her maintenance bills, and he knew that an eighty-foot plesiosaurus is not a practicable proposition. It was not hard to calculate what its weight would be, or the size of its bite, or how large a fish could pass down its narrow gullet.

"It would spend more energy just picking up fish of that size one by one," said Glenway, "than it would gain by eating them. An air-breathing creature has to show itself on the surface fairly often; if it followed shoals of mackerel, haddock, and so forth it would be as familiar to us as the basking shark. And it would be extinct, because with those jaws it couldn't defend itself against killer whales or threshers."

"Glenway, if all this is correct, you've slain your own góddam Jabberwock."

"I was afraid I had," said he. "It depressed the hell out of me. But one day it struck me that people who see something very surprising, and see it suddenly, briefly, in bad visibility, will naturally tend to exaggerate the most surprising aspect of whatever it is they see. Thus an astonishingly long snaky neck will look longer and snakier than it actually is, a small head smaller, and so forth. So I had a couple of young psychologists make a series of tests. They found a deviation running up to about twenty-five per cent. Then I asked them to modify this outline accordingly. We got this." He handed me a second sheet. "We can take it this is what was actually seen."

"Why, this damned thing's only sixty feet long!" said I. "You're correcting eye-witness reports on pure speculation."

"No, I double-checked it. I hired a reptile man and an ichthyologist, and I asked them to work out what the nearest thing to a sixty-foot plesiosaurus would be like if it were to be a practical proposition in terms of food, energy, defence, and all that."

He picked up an outline. "Put this on top of the psychologists' version," said he, "and you'll see they correspond in everything essential.

"This one weighs more than an eighty-footer," said Glenway, "anyway he's probably ten times as powerful. Those jaws have a bite of over three feet. This fellow could swallow a barracuda at a gulp. He might have to make two snaps at a porpoise. He'll follow schools of tuna, albacore, any sort of fish ranging from fifty to a hundred and fifty pounds. Not cod, of course."

"And why not cod?"

"Fishermen. He'd have been seen."

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"Oh!"

"So evidently he doesn't follow cod."

"And evidently you can sweat a positive out of a couple of demolished negatives."

Glenway showed me innumerable charts he had drawn up, and had amended by his own observations. These marked the seasonal movements of deep-sea fish in the east Pacific, and where these movements weren't known he had what data there was on the smaller fish that the larger ones preyed on. He went on down through the food chains, and down to plankton drifts and current temperatures and so forth, and with all these, modified by all sorts of other factors, he had marked out a great oval, with dates put in here and there, which tilted through those immense solitudes of ocean that stretch from the coast of Chile up to the Aleutians.

This was his beat, and two or three times I sailed with him. There were almost no islands, almost no shipping lanes.

I used to take regular spells in the crow's nest: two hours in the morning and two more in the late afternoon. You can't sit day after day looking for something without an admission, deep in your mind, of the possibility of seeing it.

I was fond of Glenway, and it would have given me great pleasure to have been the one who sighted his saurian for him somewhere far out on the flat green or the rolling blue. The very wish lent a sinewy twist to every waterlogged palm trunk that drifted across our bows, and every distant dolphin leap offered the arc of a black, wet, and leathery neck.

At the first sight of such things, my hand, more wishful even than my thoughts, would move towards the red button on the rail of the crow's nest. This, like another in the bow, and a third by the wheel, was connected with a loud buzzer in Glenway's cabin. However, the buzzer remained silent; the immense horizon, day after day, was empty.

Glenway was an excellent navigator. One morning when I was aloft he called up to ask if I could see anything ahead. I told him there was nothing, but I had no sooner raised my glasses again than I discerned a thickening, a long hump gathering itself in the infinitely faint pencil line that marked the juncture of sky and sea.

"There's something. It's land! Land ahead!"

"That's Paumoy."

He had not bothered to mention that he was going to touch at Paumoy, the main island of an isolated group north-east of the Marquesas.

The island, as we drew nearer, revealed itself as several miles of whaleback, covered with that hot froth of green which suggests coconut palms and boredom. I put down the light binoculars I was using and took up the telescope, which had a much greater range. I could see the harbour, the white bungalows spaced out round it, and I could even see the people quite clearly. Before long I saw a man catch sight of the yacht. He stared under his hand, and waved and pointed; another man came out of a bungalow with a

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pair of glasses. I saw the two of them go off at a run to where a jeep was standing.

The jeep crawled round the harbour, stopped at another bungalow; someone got out, someone got in. The jeep went toiling up a little thread-like track until it went out of sight over the ridge.

It was late afternoon when the *Zenobia*, with every sail set, floated as softly as an enormous thistledown to her anchorage in the harbour of Paumoy.

"What a dreary-looking dump!" I said. "You'd think they'd cut each other's throats out of sheer boredom."

"Well, they play poker every night of their lives, and I guess they've developed a technique of not getting on each other's nerves."

There seemed to be nothing on the island but coconut palms, which I don't like, and the blistering bungalows, all of which might have been prefabricated by the same mail-order house.

I had no more time to look about me; we were on the quay and being greeted by men in shorts and old-fashioned sun helmets, and the greeting was hearty.

"Now listen to me," said Victor Brewer, "we've got two new guys here who've been in Java. We've had them working like dogs ever since we sighted you, fixing a rijstapel. So you've got to stay to dinner, or those guys are going to be hurt. Hell, you're not going to insult a couple of fellows who are slaving over a hot stove, fixing you a dinner."

Glenway wanted nothing but to pick up our stores and be gone. I pointed out there'd probably be no wind till nightfall, so we'd be losing hardly any time. Glenway at once surrendered, and we settled to drinks and chat and to watching the sun go down.

Listening to the chat, I remembered Glenway's remark about the technique of not getting on each other's nerves. It seemed to me that this technique was being exercised, and especially for Glenway's benefit.

It was clear they knew what Glenway was after, and they even referred to it, but with such collective tact that if one of them seemed likely to dwell on it for more than a few seconds he would be steamrollered out of the conversation, generally by Mr. Brewer. It was he who asked very casually, when we had been sitting some time at dinner, if Glenway was sailing the same course as usual; if he was going to pass, give or take a hundred miles, the northern extremity of Japan.

Glenway having replied that he always followed the same course: "You know," said Vic Brewer, letting the words fall as casually as one lets fall the poker chips when the hands are high and the stakes are higher, "you know, you could do the hell of a good turn to a guy. If you felt like it, that is."

"What sort of a turn?" asked Glenway.

"There's a fellow called Geisecker," said the man on Brewer's left. "He's Charlie's brother-in-law's brother-in-law, if you can work that one out."

"He came on the copra boat," said the next man, "and he

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didn't know the mailboat doesn't call any more. So he's stuck."

"The point is, this poor guy is going to be in big trouble if he doesn't get to Tokyo in the next few weeks."

"When you get up in those latitudes you're certain to sight some boat or other bound for Japan."

"Any little tramp; a crab-fisher or anything. . ."

They spoke one after another all the way round the table. Glenway had said they played poker every night of their lives, and I was irresistibly reminded of the process of doubling up.

"We hate to see him go," said Brewer, collecting the whole matter into his hands with the genial authority of the dealer. "He's wonderful company, Bob Geisecker. But we must get him away, poor fellow! He'll pay for his passage—anything you like—if *that's* the obstacle."

"It isn't that," said Glenway. "But I haven't seen him yet."

"He's over on the other side of the island," said Brewer. "He went off with Johnny Raymonds in the jeep less than half an hour before we sighted you."

"That's funny," said I, thinking of what I'd seen through the telescope.

"Damned funny," said Brewer, "if going off to give Johnny a hand makes him miss his chance of a passage."

"I'll take him," said Glenway, "if he's back in time. But the wind's been failing us, and we're behind schedule, and—"

"Fair enough," said Brewer. "If he's back in time you'll take him. If he isn't, that's his hard luck. More rice? More chicken? More shrimp? Boy, fill up that glass for Mr. Abbott."

The dinner went on and on, and not another word was said about Mr. Geisecker.

At last the heavy frondage above the table drew a deep breath and began to live and move. The wind was up, and Glenway said we could wait no longer. We all walked together down to the quay. Glenway and I were just stepping into the dinghy when someone pointed, and looking back—as people were rightly warned not to do in the old stories—we saw, like a moonrise, the glow of headlights in the sky. The jeep was coming up on the far side of the ridge. "That's Bob," said Brewer. "But don't wait. We'll get him packed in no time, and bring him out in the launch before you can up anchor."

As we were ready to move out, the launch came alongside with Bob Geisecker and his bags. The latter had pieces of pyjamas hanging out at their sides like the tongues of panting dogs. Geisecker himself seemed a little breathless. His face, as he came up the steps into the light hanging above, had something strange about it. At first I thought it was just the flustered and confused expression of a man who had to pack and get off in such a hurry; then I thought it was the fact that, after weeks and months under an equatorial sun, this considerable face still peeled and glowed. Finally, still unsatisfied, I thought of that massive, opulently

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curved, wide-mouthed instrument which is included in every brass band, and which, when it is not playing at full blast, looks as if it ought to be, or at least is about to be. Mr. Geisecker greatly resembled this instrument, but he was very silent, and it was this that was strange.

There was a quick introduction, a brief welcome from Glenway who was busy, an uncertain mumble of thanks from our guest, and a very hasty farewell from Brewer. Glenway had to give all his attention to taking the yacht out, and Geisecker stood neglected on deck, staring after the launch, his mouth open, looking something worse than lost. I took him down to his cabin, told him we breakfasted at seven, and asked him if there was anything he wanted before turning in. He seemed only vaguely aware that I was talking to him.

" Those guys," said he, speaking like a man in a state of shock, " I kept them in stitches. In stitches—all the time! "

" Good night," I said. " I'll see you in the morning."

Next morning Geisecker joined us at breakfast. He acknowledged our greeting soberly, sat down, and looked at his plate. Glenway apologised for having been so much occupied overnight and began to discuss where and when we might hope to encounter a boat headed for Tokyo or Yokohama.

Geisecker lifted a face on which dawning enlightenment made me think of the rapid change from the blue-grey hush of the tropic night to the full glare and blare of tropic day; light, warmth, life, and laughter all came flooding in faster than one would think believable or even desirable.

" I knew it all the time! " said he exultantly. " Only I just didn't happen to think of it. I knew it was a gag. When those guys hustled me aboard this lugger I got the idea they were—you know—giving me the brush-off. They just about had me fooled. Now I get it. Anything for a laugh! They swore to me last night you were heading for Lima, Peru."

" They told me very definitely," said Glenway, staring, " that it was of the greatest importance that you should get to Tokyo."

Geisecker slapped his plump and crimson thigh with startling effect. " Those guys," said he, " they'd ship a fellow to the moon on one of these goddam spaceships if they could get a laugh out of it. Tokyo's where I came from. Lima, Peru is where I was going to. *That's* why they kept me all day over on the other side of the island. So I shouldn't hear which way you were going."

"We're short of time," said Glenway, "but I'll put about and take you back to Paumoy if you want me to."

" Not on your life," said Geisecker. " It's a good gag and I'll be damned if I spoil it. All I'm doing is just going around the world saying hullo to people, and to tell you the truth there's a little kimono lady back in Tokyo I shan't mind saying hullo to once again." With that he obliged us with a few bars from *Madam Butterfly*.

" Glenway," said I, " it's just on eight. I'll be getting up aloft."

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"Aloft?" cried Geisecker. "That sounds like the real salt-water stuff. I've never been on one of these windjammers before. You've got to give me the dope on marline-spikes, splicing the mainbrace, and all the rest of it. I tell you, boys, I'm going to learn to be a sailor. Now what's all this about going up aloft?"

"I'm just going up to the crow's nest for a couple of hours."

"What for? Looking for something?" Even as he asked the question he turned, first on me and then on Glenway, a face which resembled a Thespian as well as a porcine ham, it so overacted the simple feat of putting two and two together.

Fixing his eyes on Glenway, he slowly raised and extended an index finger of great substance. The lower joint of this finger was adorned with curving hairs, very strong and serviceable, and of a ruddy gold which glinted in the morning sun. The finger stopped about a foot short of Glenway's ribs, but its quality was so potent that it seemed to make itself felt there. I even felt it in my own.

"Abbott!" cried Geisecker triumphantly. "Now that shows you how miffed I was last night when I thought those guys had given me the brush—it didn't ring any sort of a bell. Glenway Abbott! I've heard about you, pal. Those birds told me all sorts of yarns. *You're* the guy who got married to Thora Vyborg! *You're* the guy who goes around looking for the sea serpent!"

At this point he became aware of Glenway's regard, which was, for one naked moment at least, quite deadly. Geisecker drew back a little. "But maybe," said he, "maybe they were pulling my leg. I ought to have seen it right away. A fellow with your education wouldn't fall for that cheesy old bit of hokum."

By this time Glenway had recovered himself, which is to say that he was once more subject to his customary inhibitions and compulsions. These forbade him to be discourteous to a guest; and forced him to bear witness like a zealot in favour of his large marine saurian. "Perhaps," said he, after a painful swallow or two, "you haven't considered the evidence."

He went on to summarise the affidavits of numbers of worthy citizens, all describing what was obviously the same sort of creature, seen at widely dispersed times and places.

He stressed especially the sworn evidence of naval officers and sea captains, and crowned the list with a reference to the reptile clearly seen by the bearded and impeccable gentlemen in charge of Queen Victoria's own yacht, the *Osborne*.

Geisecker, who had been listening with a widening smile, here heartily slapped Glenway on the back. "You know what it was *they* saw, brother? They saw the old girl herself, flopped overboard for a dip. What do you say, boys?" said he, addressing the question to me and to the man who was clearing the table. "That's about the size of it, believe you me! *Splash me, Albert!*"

He accompanied this last sentence with a flapping mimicry of regal and natatory gambols which, considering he was neither on a throne nor in the water, seemed to me to show talent. Glenway, like the august personage represented, was not amused.

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There was such a contest between displeasure and hospitality visible on his face that it looked for a moment like a wrestling match seen on television.

This, and the thought that I had rather let him down over the dinner on Paumoy, moved me to an unwonted self-sacrifice. " Glenway," said I, " you take my spell in the crow's nest, and I'll take the wheel this morning."

Glenway, being one of nature's martyrs, refused this handsome offer, and elected to stay down in the arena. As I went aloft I realised how those patricians must have felt who, though inclined to early Christian sympathies, were nevertheless pressed into taking a box in the Colosseum on a gala night in Nero's Rome.

Every now and then I heard a roar below me, and it was not merely that of a lion; it was that of Geisecker's laughter. Before long I saw Glenway come forward and pretend to busy himself with the little nets that were used for taking up plankton and algae. In a very few minutes Geisecker came after him, smiling, and spoke with jovial camaraderie to the two sailors who were spreading the nets.

These men looked uneasily at Glenway before they laughed; it was sufficiently obvious that the jests were concerned with the sea serpent.

Glenway then dropped his work and went aft and below. Geisecker began bellowing along the deck and, getting no response, he went down after Glenway. There was a period of calm; deceptive calm, which is calmer than the other sort. Then Glenway burst up out of the forward hatch and looked round him as if for refuge. But there is no refuge on a yacht, not even on a yacht like the *Zenobia*.

I realised that he must have slipped through the pantry into the galley and thence into the men's quarters, leaving Geisecker ditched in the saloon.

Geisecker was, of all men, the least likely to remain ditched more than three minutes. At the expiration of that time I leaned far out and looked back, and saw his mighty, sweating torso emerge from the companionway.

There are certain big fat men who, when they joke with you, seem almost to enfold you in a physical embrace. This caused me to wish we were farther from the equator, but it did not prevent me going down to try to run a little interference for Glenway.

I soon found that it was next door to impossible to draw Geisecker away from Glenway. There are certain people who, if they become dimly aware they are offensive to another, will fasten on that unfortunate with all the persistence of a cat which seeks out the one cat-hater in a crowded room. They can't believe it; they think you really love them; they are tickled and fascinated and awesomely thrilled by the fantastic improbability of your dislike.

" Good old Glen! " said Geisecker, one afternoon when Glenway had jumped up with what I can only call a muttered exclamation, and sought refuge in his cabin. " I love that guy. I love the

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way he takes a bit of ribbing. You know—straight, deadpan, and yet you can tell that underneath he just loves it."

"Not on that subject," I said. "He detests it. And so do I. It's making him miserable."

"Ah, don't give me that boloney!" said he with a good-humoured flap of his hand.

Geisecker was not in the least interested in what I said about my own reaction. Sensitive to nothing else on earth, he had, unconsciously of course, better than a dog's nose for the exact nature of the feeling he inspired. This keen sense told him that I am of a type not offended by his sort of humour, and that my mounting anger was entirely on behalf of Glenway. To him, therefore, it was vicarious, secondhand, and as flavourless as a duenna's kiss. It gave him no sort of thrill, and he had no itch to increase it. I felt quite rejected.

I went down to see if I could be more effective with Glenway. I said, "If you had the least sense of humour, you'd enjoy this monster. After all, he's the sort of thing you're looking for. He belongs to a species thought to be extinct."

"I wish to God he was," said Glenway.

"He may not come from the Pleistocene, but he's at least a survival from the Joke Book Age. He's a human coelacanth. He's a specimen of Comic Picture Postcard Man. You ought to turn your cameras on him. People'll think you're making it all up."

It was like trying to skip and run over soft sand. Each new sentence got off to a worse start and sank deeper into Glenway's depression. At last I was altogether bogged down, and we sat there just looking at each other. Then, like the last trump, there arose an urgent, heart-stopping stridulation in the buzzer box on the wall over the bed. Glenway was out of his depression, out of his chair, into the doorway, and up the companionway so quickly that one felt certain intervening movements must have been left out.

I followed as fast as I could; it was either the sea serpent or Geisecker, and in either case I thought I'd better be there.

It was Geisecker. He was standing by the wheel, hooting with laughter, pointing out over the ocean, shouting, "Thar she blows! Flukes on the starboard bow!"

Then the laughter doubled him up completely. I noticed that it can be true about people getting purple in the face. I noticed also that, even doubled up, Geisecker seemed bigger, there seemed to be more of him than at other times.

Sadder still, there seemed to be less of Glenway. He seemed to be shrunken and concentrated into a narrower and greyer column of tissue than was natural. I had time to think, He'll be driven completely out of his mind if this continues, before he turned and went down the companion out of sight.

I went over to Geisecker, wondering on the way what sort of words could possibly pierce his thick hide. "When those boys on Paumoy told me, I knew it was true," he said, "but I just felt I had to check up on it."

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"What the hell are you talking about?" I asked, cursing myself as I spoke for asking anything.

"About old-Glen and Thora Vyborg," replied Geisecker, still gasping with mirth. "Don't you know about Glen and Thora Vyborg?"

I knew they had been married. I vaguely remembered something about a dramatic love-at-first-sight encounter in Honolulu. I had some sort of a picture in my mind of the more than famous film star; of her unfathomable personality, her unknowable beauty. I could imagine that Glenway, younger then, tall, angular, already dedicated, with the ocean behind him, winged with sail, and haloed with sun and money, must have seemed to offer her a part in a rather better production.

I remembered, too, that the marriage had been extremely short-lived. Someone had said something about them sailing away with the sunset and returning with the dawn. No statement had been made by either party.

There had been rumours, as there always are, but these were weak, uncertain; they had been drowned in a flood of better authenticated adulteries long before I ever knew Glenway. Now it seemed that rumour had been washed ashore, horribly disfigured, swollen, and salty, on the ultimate beaches of Paumoy.

"You know what the boys there told me?" said Geisecker, watching me closely. "Seems they got married in no time flat and started out on this very same boat, on a big front-page honeymoon.

"Believe it or not, the very first night out—round about eleven o'clock, if you get what I mean, pal—some fellow on deck sees something or other, maybe porpoises or kelp or any damn thing you like, and he gets the idea it's the old brontosaurus in person. So he presses the buzzer, and Glen comes rushing up on deck in ten seconds flat. Don't ask me any questions, pal; all I know is that first thing next morning the lugger was turned right round, and it's full steam ahead back to Honolulu, and Reno, and points in opposite directions."

I realised at once that this was true, and had a certain beauty. However, that was for my private contemplation and had nothing to do with Geisecker. He was regarding me with a sort of arrested gloat, his eye triumphant and his nose tilted up ready to join in the expected peal of laughter.

"Geisecker," I said, and for the first time I heard, and he heard, a note of direct and personal hatred in my voice, "from now on you're going to stay right away from Glenway. You can come on deck; you can have a chair on the port side there, between the masts. But if you step an inch—"

"Hold it!" said Geisecker. "Who's talking? The owner? Skipper? First mate? Or what the hell else do you think you are? I'd like to hear what old Glen's got to say."

I am no good at all at a row. When my first damp squib of wrath has exploded I am always overwhelmed by an immense weariness and blankness. At that moment I had neither the will

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nor the power to go on. But Geisecker obligingly came to my assistance. I could never decide whether he was a sadist, avid for the discomfort of his victim, or a masochist, indecently eager for the wound of being disliked. Whichever it was, he watched me with his little eye, and he actually passed his tongue over his lips. "Anyway," said he, "I'm going down to ask him if there's any truth in that goddam yarn or not."

The lip-licking was so crude and so banal that it transposed everything into a different key. There was a sailor of great good nature and phenomenal size, a man called Wiggam, a native of Hawaii, who was mending a net a little way along the deck. I called him and told him, in phrases which normally appear only in balloons in comic strips, to take his net and work on it outside Abbott's door and, in the event of Geisecker approaching that door, to cut his belly open.

I gave these deplorable instructions in a rather cold, staccato tone, and I was reminded, even as I heard myself speak, of a small boy's imitation of a tommy-gun. Had Geisecker laughed, or had the sailor looked surprised or reluctant, I should have been in a very ludicrous situation. However, it seems that sailors are simple folk; this one showed alacrity, his teeth, and a spring-knife that seemed all the more purposeful for being of very moderate dimensions. He glanced at Geisecker, or rather at the belly in question, as if making certain precise and workmanlike calculations, and then he went and gathered up the long net and carried it below.

Geisecker watched all this with growing seriousness.

"Look," said he, "maybe I got things wrong somehow, but—"

"Listen, Fatso," said I, "if you get anything else wrong you're going to be put on a little Jap crab-fisher boat, see? And the name of that boat's going to be screwed up when we write it down in the log. Because it'll be a Japanese name that means *the boat that never returned.* Or never existed. Work that one out next time you feel like kidding."

I went down and found Glenway lying on his bed, not reading. I said, "I've fixed him. I can't believe it, but I have."

"How?" said Glenway, not believing it either.

When I had told him, he said, "He won't stay fixed, not by that sort of thing."

I said, "You think so because I've related it with a twinkle. When I spoke to Geisecker my voice was cold and dead like steel, and I let my eyelids droop a little. Like this."

"He certainly won't stay fixed," said Glenway.

"In that case his belly will be cut open," said I. "Because to Hill Wiggam, who is sitting right out there in the passage, this is his moment of fulfilment. Or it will be if Geisecker tries to get past him. It's a case of a man suddenly finding his vocation."

"I don't want Wiggam getting into trouble," said Glenway.

"Nor," said I, "does Geisecker." With that I went up and did my afternoon spell in the crow's nest, and later I had a drink with Geisecker, to whom I said as little as possible, not knowing what to

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say or how to say it. I dined with Glenway in his cabin and then had a smoke with Geisecker on the port deck, and at about ten o'clock I went to spend the last hour of the evening with Glenway.

" What's the night like? " he asked.

I said, " It's the most wonderful night of the whole cruise. The moon's just on full, and someone's let it down on an invisible wire, and you can see the curve of the stars going up behind it. The wind's light, but there's a hell of a big swell rolling in from somewhere. She's still got everything on but her balloon jib, and she's riding it like a steeplechaser. Why don't you go up and take the wheel for a bit? "

" Where's Geisecker? " asked Glenway.

" Amidships, on the port side, fenced in invisibly by threats," I said with some pride.

" I'll stay down here," said Glenway.

" Glenway," said I, " you're making altogether too much of this. The fact is, you've led a sheltered life; people like Geisecker have always treated you with far too much respect. It sets you apart, and I find it rather offensive. Just because your iniquitous old grandfather happened to build a few railways—"

" First of all," interrupted Glenway, " it was not my grandfather but my great grandfather. What's more—"

And at that moment, just as I was exulting in having induced him to unclench his hands, and look out of his eyes, the buzzer sounded again. I had forgotten to have it disconnected.

What was quite pathetic was that Glenway couldn't control an instinctive movement towards leaping off the bed. He arched up like a tetanus victim, and then collapsed as flat as an empty sack. The buzzer went on. I had a panicky feeling that he might arch up again at any moment. I lost my head, picked up a stool, and pounded that rattlesnake box into silence.

The silence, once achieved, seemed deep and complete. This was an illusion; we soon noticed that there were all sorts of noises here and there in the large emptiness left by the death of the outrageous buzzer. We could hear the patter of running feet on deck, and voices, and especially Geisecker's voice, spouting large jets of urgent sound.

I opened the door and the words came rushing in. " Glen, Glen! Come up! Can't you hear me? Come on, quick! "

" My! " I said. " Maybe they *are* cutting his belly open."

With that, I ran up. Geisecker was at the head of the companionway. He turned his head briefly to send another shout down the stairs; then he turned it back again to stare out over the sea. I barged into him. He blindly clutched at my arm and dragged me to the side of the boat, and pointed.

I saw something already disappearing into the great smooth side of one of the enormous waves. It was black, wet, shining, and very large. These words can be applied to a whale or a whale-shark, and maybe to two or three other things.

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I can summon up with absolute precision the way Geisecker's face was turning as I came up the companionway; I can remember exactly how his shout went on a little after he had turned his head back to look over the sea again. But I haven't the same perfect mental photograph of what I saw disappearing into the wave.

To the very best of my recollection I saw the hinder half of an enormous back and, following on a curve, already half lost in the black and moon-glitter, a monstrous tail.

The men who had run up were standing three or four paces away. I looked at them, and they nodded. As they did so I heard Glenway's voice speaking to the men. "You saw it?"

He had come up after all, and had seen my look and their response as he came towards us.

One of them said, "Yes, but he shout," pointing to Geisecker. "He shout, shout, shout, and it go under."

Glenway stepped towards Geisecker, thus turning his back on the men. They couldn't see his face, but I could see it, and so could Geisecker.

I don't think Glenway even raised his hand. Geisecker stepped backwards, which brought him, at what I would have thought a very slight and harmless angle, against the low gunwale. His big, fat, heavy torso went on and over, his feet went up, and he was gone. He was overboard.

I don't remember putting my hand on the lifebelt, but I can remember flinging it, skimming it almost parallel with the side of the boat, and feeling sure it hit the water within a very few feet of Geisecker. Then the boat, whose six knots or so had been like nothing at all a moment earlier, seemed to be racing ahead faster than any boat had ever gone before.

Glenway shouted; the helmsman put the helm over and spilt the wind out of her sails. There was always a boat ready to be lowered at record speed. Two men were at the oars, Glenway took the tiller, and I stood in the bows looking out for Geisecker who could be no more than two or three hundred yards away.

The night was clear beyond all description. The enormous smooth swells gleamed and flashed under the moon. The yacht, when we had drawn away from her, stood up like a snowy alp on the water; and when, at the top of each swell, the men lifted their oars for a moment, it was a moment of unbelievable silence, as if some tremendous creature was holding its breath.

Then I saw Geisecker.

We were lifted high on one of the great glassy hills of sea, and he was beginning to slide down the slope of another. He had the lifebelt. I couldn't see his real features at that distance, but the white moonlight gave him such great hollow black eyes, and made such a crater of his open mouth, that I got the picture of a clown in comic distress. Then he went down, and we went down, and two or three ridges twenty feet high humped themselves between us.

I said, "He's ahead of us; a couple of hundred feet. You'll see him from the top of the next one."

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But we didn't.

I began to wonder if a man and a lifebelt rise and fall faster or slower on a rolling sea than does a fourteen-foot boat. Before I could work out the answer we had gone up and down again and had arrived at a spot extremely close to where I had seen him.

"You misjudged the distance," said Glenway after perhaps half a puzzled minute.

"I must have. Anyway, he's got the lifebelt. He'll be all right. Let's row in a circle."

One of the men put out a bailing can as a marker. The giant swells were so smooth that, ballasted with a couple of inches of water, the can floated up and down without shipping another drop. We went round it on a hundred foot radius and then at a hundred and fifty feet. Geisecker was not to be seen. And we could see, at one time or another, every square foot of water where he could possibly be.

"He's sunk!" said Glenway. "Cramp—a shark—"

"No shark would have taken the lifebelt down. It'd be floating right here. We'd see it." The words were scarcely out of my mouth when we saw it. It breached up, right out of the water—must have come up from God knows how many fathoms—then fell back with a splash just a boat's length ahead of us. Next moment it was beside our bow and I reached out and lifted it aboard.

I turned, holding it in my hands, and showed it to Glenway. It was easier than speaking, and not so silly. We both knew perfectly well that no known creature, except possibly a sperm whale, could have taken Geisecker and the lifebelt down to that sort of depth. And we knew that what I had seen, and what the men had seen, was not a sperm whale.

We rowed round in circles for a little longer, and then we pulled back to the yacht. When we were aboard again, I said to Glenway, "You didn't as much as touch him. You didn't even mean to touch him. You didn't even raise your hand."

"And some of the men were watching," said Glenway with the utmost calm. "They can testify to that."

He saw my surprise, and smiled. "From the most scrupulous legal point of view," said he, "it was a pure accident. And we'll make a report accordingly. Of course, I killed the man."

"Now, wait a minute," said I.

"Excuse me," said he. We were near the wheel. He took it from the man who was steering and said something to him, and the man ran forward calling to the rest of the crew who were still on deck. Next minute the helm went up, the booms swung over, the sails bellied out on the other side, and the great boat was gybed and sweeping round on to a new course.

"Where are we heading now?" said I to Glenway.

"Due east," said he. "To San Francisco."

"To make the report? Can't you . . .?"

"To put the boat up for sale."

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I said, "Glenway, you're upset. You've got to see this business in proportion."

"He was alive and enjoying himself, and now he's dead. I didn't like him; I detested him, but that's got nothing to do with it."

I said, "Don't be completely psychologically illiterate. It's got everything in the world to do with it. You hated his guts, a little too intensely, perhaps, but very understandably. You wished he was dead. In fact, you more or less said so. Now you've got guilt feelings; you're going to take the blame for it. Glenway, you're an obsessive type; you're a Puritan, an early Christian. Be reasonable. Be moderate."

But Glenway wasn't listening. He beckoned the man who had been steering, and turned the wheel over to him. He gave him the course and told him who was to relieve him in each watch. Then he turned away and walked forward. He walked like a passenger. He walked like a man walking on a street. He was walking away from his mania and in the very hour of its justification.

The beautiful *Zenobia* was to be sold, the crew disbanded and the large marine saurian left to dwindle into a figure on an old map, distant and disregarded in its watery solitude.

As for myself, all my friendship with Glenway had been aboard the boat; I was part of it. I had been the accomplice of his obsession, and now he was, in a way I didn't like, cured.

I felt that I too was up for sale, that clear night in the Pacific, amid the flash and glitter of the enormous glassy waves, and the silence, with the boat rising and falling so high and so low, and the yacht like a hill of snow in the distance—and the little bailing can still visible at over a hundred feet.

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"Thanks for baby-sitting for us, Millicent."

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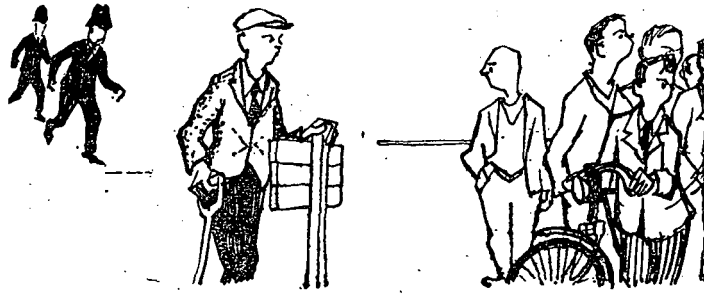

BY DUFF HART-DAVIS

MICK RENSHAW barged open the door of his rooms and flung away his gown and mortarboard in disgust. The mortarboard planed across the table and took with it two coffee cups and a sugar bowl; there was a crash of breaking china. Mick took no notice, but collapsed full length in an armchair.

"Hell!" he exclaimed savagely. "Hell and damnation!"

"What happened?" John Wilson, Mick's room-mate, raised his spectacles to his forehead and emerged cautiously from his early-morning coma behind the newspaper.

"Another two quid," Mick groaned. "That makes five—three to the police, and now two to the *proctors*." He fairly spat out the word.

"What did they say?"

"He—the same old one—mewed away about proctorial regulations. 'Gross contempt, gross disregard,' he kept saying. I felt like saying 'Gross proctorial idiocy.' Bloody man. He looks as though he's made of paper—all dried-up and yellow. He ought to be folded up and put away. One foot in the grave and the other on a banana skin. Ugh!"

Mick's ancient car, Ninon, was harried constantly by the proctors, and a fine for leaving her out at night was nothing new. Mick conducted a permanent campaign against the University

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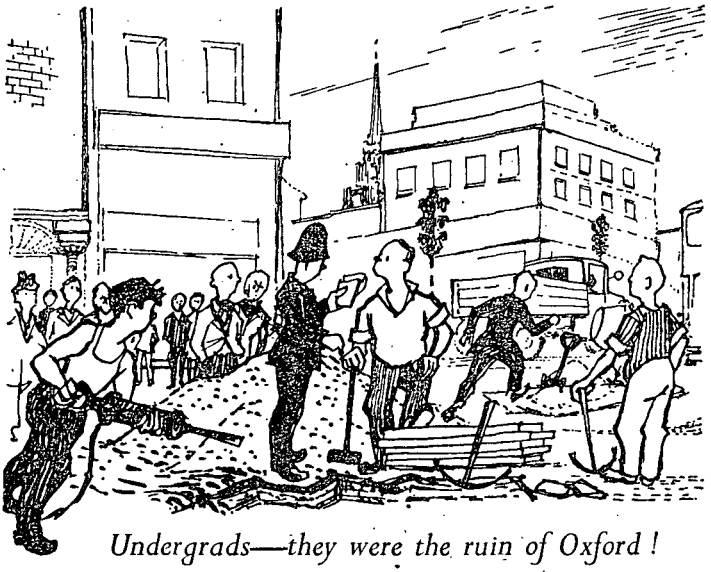

Undergrads—they were the ruin of Oxford!

police, maintaining that it was cheaper to defy the rules and keep his car in the open because even regular fines amounted to far less than the cost of a garage. All the same, five pounds for a single offence was a bit rough.

Mick shifted listlessly in his chair, muttering curses to himself. He let out a deep sigh of irritation and picked up another paper from the floor.

For a moment he idly scanned the front page, morose and frowning; then his frown dissolved into a grin.

"Hey, John!" he said eagerly, "listen to this—

> "Police patrolling the Strand have lately been puzzled by a large hole dug and left unattended in the middle of the street. Inquiries have now revealed that the hole was dug for a rag by students from London University who disguised themselves as workmen and pretended they were repairing a gas main."

Mick thrust the paper away and jumped to his feet. He began striding up and down, his face alight with enthusiasm.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "What d'you think of that?"

"Full marks to the students, I reckon," said John, smiling. "But what are you getting so het up about?"

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"Don't you *see*?" asked Mick impatiently.

"What do you mean?" John was still half comatose. "Are you going to dig up the High or something?"

"Exactly—at least, no: better than that—" He broke off, realising that he had been carried away by his own excitement.

"As I was coming back just now, I noticed that there *was* a gang of navvies digging up the High, just below Carfax. They're there now, digging a hole . . ."

He stormed up and down the room again, lashing out viciously at any piece of furniture he came near. John, recognising the symptoms, carefully withdrew his legs from the line of fire and coiled them underneath his chair.

"We've got 'em!" Mick declared triumphantly, coming to an abrupt halt in front of the fireplace. "The whole damn lot—police, progs, and all!" And the brilliance of his idea sparkled in his eyes as he explained his plan to John.

An hour later they carefully synchronised their watches and moved off into the town. John, whose scholarly appearance made him the obvious candidate for the first phase of the operation, bicycled down St. Aldate's to the central police station—no more than three hundred yards from Carfax—while Mick walked up to Carfax itself.

At eleven o'clock exactly John left the bicycle in a side-turning, donned a borrowed gown, a pair of heavily horn-rimmed spectacles, and an expression of extreme agitation, and rushed distractedly through the doors of the police station.

"I really must see the Chief Constable at once!" he cried, gibbering very fast in a precise falsetto voice. "Oh!" he exclaimed, wringing his hands, "it is *too* dreadful."

His onslaught made no impression on the duty-sergeant, whose "Can I help you, sir?" was professionally disinterested.

"Sergeant," John shrieked, "it is *imperative* that I speak to the Chief Constable—"

"I'm sorry, sir," the sergeant cut in firmly, "he ain't in, not yet." He shot a wry glance at the clerk typing in the corner. These flipping dons, it said, mad as hatters!

John leapt back and forth in an agony of feigned exasperation. "It is desperately urgent!" he shouted. "What can I do?"

"Can't I help you, sir?"

"Well—oh well—yes, I suppose you may be able to." He danced a little fandango of agitation before rushing on again. "It's something I heard about last night; I never dreamt it would actually happen, but now it has. Oh!" he groaned, clapping his hand to his head and blinking furiously at the ceiling.

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" I can hardly bring myself to say it—" he dropped his voice to an appalled whisper—" some undergraduates from my college are digging up the High! "

" Digging it up, sir? " At last interest sharpened the sergeant's voice. " How do you mean? "

" Digging? My dear man, the Latin fodio, fodire, to dig or excavate." John saw the man wince and took heart. " They are desecrating the town," he gibbered on. " They have disguised themselves as workmen and are digging up the street for a joke. For a jape, you take my meaning? "

" Yes, sir." The sergeant stifled his irritation with an effort. He reached for a notebook. " May I have the names of the undergraduates concerned? "

" Well, I—er—I—perhaps I'd better not . . ." John was almost airborne with embarrassment. " You see, the circumstances in which I overheard their conversation do not—er—reflect credit on—er—hum—" he cleared his throat violently and gave a lightning giggle— " myself. I was, Sergeant, as it were, eavesdropping.

" But that is immaterial," he went on, too fast for the sergeant to interrupt. " All that matters is that they should be stopped before they can effect more damage. Oblige me by taking immediate steps to stop them."

The sergeant gave him a withering look and said loudly, " Right, sir; I'll get someone up there."

" But you must be quick about it."

" It's quite all right, sir. We'll have someone there straight away. May I have your name, sir? "

" Mr. Higgs—Mr. Justin Higgs. Of Christ Church," he added for good measure, and suddenly spun round and rushed wildly out into the street, half hidden by the flying folds of his gown.

Meanwhile, Mick had been loitering with intent. At exactly eleven-ten he rounded the corner into the High Street and crossed over to the group of workmen excavating the road.

" Your boss around? " he asked the man with the pneumatic drill, in what he hoped was a passable Cowley accent.

" Over there." The man jerked his head towards a short, thickset man who was wielding a pickaxe. " Geyser to see yer, guv," he called.

Mick eyed the heavily-tattooed forearms uneasily, wondering whether any policeman could possibly mistake them for those of an undergraduate.

Still, it was too late to worry about it now.

" 'Morning," he said pleasantly. " It's none o' my business,

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really, but I thought I'd better tell you—I just come up St. Aldate's and 'eard a couple o' young fellers talking. Dressed up as coppers, they are. Reckon as 'ow they're going to 'ave a laugh and come and tell your blokes to clear off out of 'ere. I wouldn't stand no nonsense from them, not if I was you. I'd give 'em what for, good and proper."

"Dressed up as coppers?" The foreman had slight trouble grasping the idea. His heavy eyebrows contracted. "How d'yer mean?"

"What I said," replied Mick indignantly. "Dressed up as bobbies—proper uniforms and all, only they're undergraduates. Made me real livid, they did."

"Murder!" exclaimed the foreman suddenly. His anger was obviously quicker than his wits: he spat lavishly on his hands. "Blinkin' undergrads!" he snarled. "I knows that lot. I've 'ad 'em before. I'll shift 'em—by 'eaven I will!"

"Well," said Mick diffidently, "as I say, it ain't really any o' my business, but I thought . . ."

"Don't you worry about that, mate." The foreman was grimly jovial at the prospect of action. "Just leave 'em to me."

"Cheerio, then," said Mick, "I'll be getting along."

"Cheerio, mate. And thanks for the tip-off. 'Ere, Ted," he called, turning away, "give us the seven-pound 'ammer a minute . . ."

Half a minute's walk brought Mick to the post office. Safely ensconced in a public call-box, he telephoned the proctors. A clerk answered. Yes, the Junior Proctor was in. Who was speaking, please?

"Superintendent, city police," said Mick, in his deferential-sergeant-major's manner. He waited a few moments, and then the thin, papery voice came crackling into his ear.

"The Junior Proctor speaking. Good morning."

"Good morning, sir. Superintendent, city police here. I'm sorry to bother you, sir, but we're having a spot of trouble with some of your undergraduates in the High, by Carfax. There's a gang of them pretending they're navvies and digging the road up. I've got two of my lads there, but apparently the undergrads aren't taking much notice of them."

"Dear me. This is disgraceful!" The parchment voice was brittle with alarm.

"I wouldn't have bothered you, sir, only as it's undergrads causing the trouble, I thought it would be better if you could send some of your fellows round to deal with them."

"Yes, yes, of course. I'll do that at once."

"That's very good of you, sir. Thank you very much."

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"Oh, no, no. Not at all. It's the least I can do."
"Good morning, sir."
"Good morning."

Mick walked quickly back up St. Aldate's to Carfax, and arrived there just as two young and decidedly nervous-looking policemen sauntered with ostentatious bravado over to the group of workmen. Mick skipped between two lorries and emerged on the far pavement just in time to see them reach their destination.

"Now then," began the leading constable aggressively, "what's going on here?"

"Clear out!" The foreman had fallen his men in behind him, each with a more or less murderous weapon at the ready. His voice was loaded with menace.

The policeman turned pale, taken aback by the violence of his reception.

"I wouldn't talk to me like that if I were you," he said. But a distinct note of fright sounded through the bluster, and the foreman was on to it in a flash.

"Clear out!" he said again, even louder and more fiercely than before.

The two constables looked at each other doubtfully. The foreman pounced on their uncertainty. "Ha!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "You wasn't expecting us to be ready for you, was you? But I knows your lot, and what's more, I knows how to deal with 'em."

A gleam came into his eyes; he sprang forward and with surprising dexterity snatched off the nearer of the two helmets and flipped it under the wheels of a passing bus. It came out two-dimensional and grey.

The policeman started forward in anger, but restrained himself; parted from his helmet, and with his hair standing on end, he looked more than a little ridiculous. An appreciative crowd began to gather on the pavements.

"That'll larn yer," said the foreman vindictively. "Teach yer to come and try yer funny games on *me*. Go on now, clear off."

The second constable made a desperate effort to retrieve the situation; he stepped forward and with a flourish produced a notebook and pencil.

"What's your company?" he asked.

"Millford's," said the foreman. "What's yours?" He made another lunge, grabbed the notebook, and lobbed it into the back of a coal lorry which was just drawing through the lights.

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The policeman shouted and leapt away in pursuit, tripped over a plank and came down face first in a largish heap of newly-mixed cement.

As he struggled to his feet, speechless and blinded, his companion bolted through the cordon of delighted spectators in the direction of the police station.

By now the crowd had swollen to well over a hundred. In the middle of the crossroads an empty hearse drove slowly and with great dignity head-on into a bus: both drivers had been unable to take their eyes off the cement-encrusted policeman, and both claimed the accident was the other's fault.

Amid a crescendo of angry hooting, the traffic jammed solid.

Success had made the foreman effusive.

"All right, boys," he was saying to his little army, "if the other one comes back, put 'im in the cement, just the same. Bloody undergraduates," he yelled, appealing to the crowd, "they're the ruin of Oxford!"

At that moment there was a commotion in front of the bank, and out into the arena popped the Junior Proctor, in full academic dress, flanked by two Bulldogs—strong-arm supporters who accompany the proctors whenever they anticipate the need for force. These two were immaculately clad in their traditional uniform of dark-blue suits and bowler hats.

The foreman swung round; now that his blood was up there was no stopping him.

"*Murder!*" he roared. "More of 'em!"

Before the astonished men could move, the foreman had whipped off both bowlers and the mortarboard and thrown them to the crowd.

A cheer went up, part encouraging, part derisive. Recovering, the Bulldogs grappled with their assailant; he hurled them away, sending both them and the quavering proctor backwards into the crowd. The rush of bodies brought down about a dozen people. One or two of the more enthusiastic undergraduate spectators seized the opportunity and dashed yelling to the aid of the workmen.

In a few seconds a free-for-all was raging, with grenades of molten cement whistling among the combatants, and the marooned hearse acting as a stop-bank for high shots.

The Junior Proctor disappeared, piping thinly, and was trampled into the asphalt.

Suddenly there was a chorus of shrill whistling, and a whole stream of policemen flowed in among the mass of struggling bodies like rivulets running into sand.

Mick, who had been watching entranced from a safe vantage

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point, judged it unwise to stay any longer and slid reluctantly away back to college.

At dinner in Hall that night, everyone was talking about the Carfax Brawl, as the evening paper called it, which had caused, among other things, frightful traffic chaos and the arrest of twenty-eight people. Mick's friends speculated wildly as to its origin, and he joined in their conversation with the double enjoyment one gets from knowing a great deal more than one pretends.

After dinner he went along to the porter's lodge to see if any notes had come in for him. There were two, one of which was an invitation to a party. The other was small and squat and somehow familiar; as Mick opened it, a sinister warning chord sounded somewhere inside him.

The colour drained from his face as he read.

Mr. M. B. Renshaw is requested to call on the Junior Proctor at 9.30 a.m. on Thursday. Cap and gown to be worn.

Thursday—that was tomorrow! He rushed back to his room, where John was in the middle of making coffee.

"They've found out!" he gasped.

"Nonsense," said John calmly, without turning round. "They can't have."

"They damn well have—look at this." He thrust the note at him.

"It must be for something else," said John, after scrutinising it for a moment. "It's probably the car again."

"It can't be—we cleared all that up this morning."

Together they went carefully over every stage of their plan, trying to detect a slip they had made or a point at which they might have given themselves away, but found none. Mick passed a miserable night, haunted by the thought of the exceedingly awkward letter he would have to write to his father.

As he went into the Clarendon building the next morning, the proctors' steward greeted him. "Hullo," he said jauntily, "you again? What's it for this time?"

"Haven't a clue," said Mick breezily.

"Let's see now," said the man, looking down his list for the day. "Renshaw, isn't it? That's funny—you're not down here. Sure it's today?"

"Positive," replied Mick.

But neither the proctors nor their secretary knew anything about Mick's summons, and he was sent back to college to collect the slip of paper which he had left behind. He arrived back in his room breathing fire and fulminating against proctorial

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incompetence. "They really *are* a shower," he said furiously. "First they drag me all the way down to their lousy office, and then they pretend they haven't even sent me a note."

John looked out from behind his morning paper. "You're sure it was the proctors who sent it to you?" he asked innocently.

"Why yes, of course it was. At least . . ." Mick broke off as he noticed that John was smiling at him in a most peculiar way.

"You can't mean it," he shouted, as comprehension burst over him. "You don't mean *you* sent—? You absolute—!"

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Champagne Cocktail

They quaff the gay bubbly in Eccleston Square . . .

SAKI, *When William Came*

Ninety Per Cent Proof

A little while ago at the house of a friend someone spilt some champagne, and I, continuing to talk, automatically dipped my fingers in it and dabbed them behind my ears.

"Ah!" said my host. "Brought up in a night-club."

And he was right.

FRANCES DONALDSON, *Child of the Twenties*

There was a young girl of Park Lane
Who rinsed out her smalls in champagne.
Said the Council, "It's urgent
You change your detergent,
For the foam is obstructing the drain."

No Heeltaps?

The only excitement in the neighbourhood is an old woman holding a subordinate post in Judith's day nursery, who has locked herself in for eleven days with a plentiful supply of gin which she persuaded a little boy to fetch her on the pretext of wanting it for a solution to wash her feet. The police are earnestly studying the law books for a precedent.

EDWARD MARSH, *in a letter to Edward Horner*

Champagne certainly gives one werry gentlemanly ideas.

ROBERT SMITH SURTEES, *Mr. Jorrocks in Paris*

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BLONDE TRESPASS

If she had been anybody else
he would have thrown her out

BY EDWARD LINDALL

MARTIN SLADE had just returned from lunch in the camp when he saw them coming, walking inside the frame of his hut window like long-distance figures in a film. Egil Voitkuns, his foreman, and Egil's daughter Baiba, striding across the two hundred yards of bright green plain that separated their two-tent home from his construction camp train.

He frowned as he took the hunting rifle from its pegs above his desk and turned towards the door.

"Blast Egil," he told the door with the sudden bitterness reserved for old friends guilty of stupidity. "Blast him. Why did he have to bring the girl?"

As he stood for a moment on the deck of the railroad car on which his hut was perched, his dark eyes narrowed against the bite of winter air. Against his thoughts, too.

Saturday afternoon was his time for relaxation, and all through this winter, with the kangaroos plentiful around their mobile camp, Egil and he, with his dog Rusty, had gone hunting, taking turns with the gun. Two men and a dog. And kangaroo-tail soup for Sunday dinner. It didn't come any better. Or, Martin thought grimly now, it hadn't.

He clumped down the short ladder slanting to the ground, a solidly-built tall man, tight-packed with energy. It showed in the firm precision of his movements, the alertness in his fine-boned face with its wide, strong mouth and curving nose. There was a touch of sternness, too, self-imposed and maintained from a conviction that it was necessary. There was also a hint of uneasiness as he watched Egil Voitkuns and his daughter coming close.

At thirty-two Martin Slade was construction engineer for this new four hundred miles of railroad through the lonely Australian north, boss of a work force of more than a hundred migrant men from a dozen different European countries.

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He could cope with them and the engineering problems as a job of work to be equated with the progress of the road. But the problem of Baiba Voitkuns was something else again—a personal problem. If she had been the daughter of anyone else but Egil, he would have thrown her out within an hour of her arrival a fortnight ago. But Egil was a first-rate foreman and a friend. He had to give it time.

" You do not mind that Baiba comes?" Egil said.

He was standing close then, bulky in winter clothes, pale and square like a block of marble. He had that milky whiteness of skin so often found in Latvians, and the straight yellowish hair that went with it. His eyes were light blue. They were looking straight at Slade, pleading with him.

" Didn't know she went hunting," Slade said stiffly.

Egil shook his head. " She does not, but she would like to go with us. She has been in camp for two weeks now. She needs the little outing."

As he listened to Egil's pedantic English, Slade let his eyes rest coolly on the girl, on the fresh, pink-cheeked beauty of her face with its full mouth and deep blue eyes, roamed them down her slender body, past the tartan shirt, on down to her feet, letting her know she wasn't welcome.

" Well? " Egil said.

" She'll never keep up with us," Slade said.

Egil smiled, and two fans of wrinkles opened from each corner of his mouth. " She will keep up. She is stronger than you think."

" I promise," Baiba said.

She spoke English without accent, as a mother tongue. She was twenty-four, and had been at school in Australia. She spoke with inflection now, heavily accenting the word " promise " to guy its meaning. Her face was mock serious, and there was a challenge in her eyes.

Slade saw it spearing at him, met it with the hard stare he used to face down strikers spoiling for trouble. And all that happened was that her mouth moved slightly in a smile. Amusement there, and the challenge in her eyes. She was an only child, and her mother dead. She was spoilt, of course, he thought.

He deliberately withdrew his gaze and ran it, with check-stops, over the whole length of the train. He didn't need to check anything, but he felt strangely off balance with this girl and needed the diversion. She stirred up a bitterness he had thought was gone—something that had happened and been sealed off months ago.

There was little life about the train on this off-duty afternoon. Most men were in the dining hut, Slade knew, playing poker,

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some sleeping in their bunks, some writing letters, and others just keeping out of the cold air. The train stood on a temporary siding, ties and rails laid bare and single-bolted. There were thirty-four cars. Thirty carried wooden huts, two to the car, two men to a hut. The others carried service huts, dining, cookhouse, washrooms, and Slade's own. A small glow of pride moved in Slade as he scrutinised it. Within two hours they could pack, hitch on a locomotive, shunt to the main line and be on the move. It represented comfort and utility. It was a man's camp in a man's world. It was no place for a girl, he thought bitterly.

Baiba Voitkuns was a potential threat to its efficiency. She would have to go. The only thing to decide was—when?

"Martin, we are wasting time," Egil said.

Slade turned to him slowly, sensing a brittle diminution of his friendship. "O.K.," he said, "let's go."

They headed out on to the plain then, Rusty appearing suddenly from some hiding place and frisking ahead, the three of them walking abreast. Slade carried the rifle, a 25.20 Winchester, and Egil had an empty sugar bag hitched in his belt to take home the tails. Kangaroo meat was tough and rank, but the tails made epicure's soup. They walked in silence because that was the way it had always been in the past on these Saturday hunting trips. The two men had talked only of necessity, about the hunting, savouring the goodness of relaxation, the uncomplicated singleness of carrying a gun and stalking.

Slade thought of this wryly now as they entered a patch of broken country and he took the lead, skirting the dramatic red gash of a dry storm watercourse, and heading for a low tree-clad ridge some thousand yards away. He heard Baiba Voitkuns say something to her father and laugh softly. He saw, in his mind, her soft lips turning upwards and the glisten of small white teeth. The picture drove grimness into him.

Suddenly, somehow, as a product of her laugh, he had realised why she so unsettled him, stinging the old bitterness into active life again. If she had been dark instead of fair, a little taller and a few years older, she could have passed as Barbara Gillen's sister.

Barbara was married now, had been for eleven months. She had waited exactly three weeks for Martin Slade after he had taken this railroad job, then married a city engineer with a fat chequebook and a taste for luxury. She had said in a short, cruel, scented letter that she didn't want a man who chose to break his fingernails in the backwoods of civilisation.

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Slade had been hurt at first, desperately hurt, then gradually lost it in concentration on his job. He even grew philosophical; maybe she was all right as a woman, but wrong for him. He needed someone with courage, if he needed anyone; someone who would grapple with a thing and see it through.

And here, he thought, was another matching point with Baiba Voitkuns. She had fled the city because she was lonely, left a good secretarial job to housekeep a two-tent camp for her father, because she hadn't the courage to make her own way. Slade wondered if she'd sent some man a scented letter, saying good-bye because she couldn't bear to live away from her father. His mouth twisted in a grin that had no humour in it—

"Martin!"

Slade heard the sudden whisper of his name and froze. Egil came pussyfoot beside him and took the rifle, then slipped off into the straggling mulga scrub now on their right. Rusty went after him, not frisking any more. He had become a hunting dog. This was their rule. First man to see a kangaroo took first stalk. Thereafter they went in turn.

Slade's eyes searched for the animal, combing bushes and trees, sliding round the scattered rocks on the lower slopes of the ridge; then slid back to a boulder where the plain rose up.

And there it was, just beyond the boulder, five hundred yards or more ahead. A Great Gray, on its own, ears erect and nuzzling the suspicious air.

Slade didn't move, not even to check on Egil out there somewhere in the scrub. Then the 'roo dropped its head to grass. Slade sat down quickly on a stone and motioned to Baiba Voitkuns. Too late. She was beside him, lips slightly parted and excitement sparkling in her face. Like the morning sun on dew, Slade thought. Then he grimaced with annoyance at having conjured the description.

"Don't move again," he whispered sharply. "Not even a finger. Freeze."

"But shouldn't we hide?"

"The 'roo sees movement, not objects," he said. "That's how you stalk him. Move while he's eating, stop when he looks up. We can watch the show from here."

"Is Father good?"

"He'll do," Slade said. "Don't talk. Sound carries."

There was no chance of their whispered talk carrying five hundred yards in that heavy winter air, but Slade was uncomfortable being alone with her now that he had identified his reaction. He thought to allay the uneasiness with silence. It didn't work. He was too conscious of her. He could detect a

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fragrance over and above the smell of grass, of saltbush, and of eucalyptus. Not something from a bottle, but personal; something that rose subtly from a glowing skin.

A strange nervousness began fluttering in his stomach. His neck felt thick and hot. His face began to burn, and then he couldn't take it any longer. He moved away. And as he moved, he knew he had done wrong. The kangaroo jerked up, whirled, and took off with one gigantic leap.

"Damn it," Slade yelled, lunging to his feet. "Oh, damn!"

Then he heard the muffled whunk of a bullet striking home. The kangaroo faltered only slightly in the air, but when it landed the great hind legs crumpled and the grey body slid to a halt against a bush. Slade whistled gustily in relief.

"Never mind," Baiba Voitkuns said. "I won't tell Father."

"I got cramp," he lied.

She smiled up into his face. "Freeze," she said. "Don't talk."

Slade felt the stirring of anger then, not because of her mockery although that nettled him, but because he had acted like a fool. And more than that, because the reason for the foolishness made all his attitudes and actions suspect. He cursed silently, perplexed and angry at himself, at everything. He moved off, and his foot slipped on a stone. He went down on hands and knees. And as he scrambled up a hand came to his elbow. A strong hand that he could feel through his jacket. It burnt, not fiercely, but with a gentle warmth.

Baiba's face, big-eyed, was close to his. He had a swift glimpse of eyes and lips of unimagined tenderness. The eyes so clearly blue, the lips so soft. He pulled away abruptly.

"Why don't you go home?" he growled.

The soft lips firmed, the blue eyes narrowed slightly. "Home is where my father lives," she said.

"A railroad camp is no home for a girl."

"You think so?"

"Listen," he said harshly. "There's a hundred men living on that train—single, married, divorced, all sorts—a few hundred yards from you."

She patted her short blonde hair and smiled caustically. "And out of them all, you are the only one who has been rude."

Slade's dark eyes snapped. "I happen to be in charge. The camp, job, everything, are my responsibility. If there's any trouble it comes back on me."

She nodded, calmly unimpressed. She looked at him with cool assessment, as though putting together pieces she had previously dissected and examined. "I think you've been up here too long,"

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Baiba said quietly. "You're lonely and you don't know why."

Slade felt that slam home like a right cross to a left lead he hadn't even seen. The blood drummed in his ears, and a sly, subversive voice began telling him there was truth in what she said. It made him want to hurt, as though by hurting he could still its tongue.

"There's one thing I do know," he said roughly. "You couldn't take it in the city. You've come running to your father. You haven't the courage to stand alone."

"Courage?"

She looked away and he stood waiting tensely, following her gaze round the green beauty of the plain, so vast in scope between the two horizons, where the deep red earth could be glimpsed among the clumps of grass, and the wind-twisted trees reached out like arms to touch and hold. He wondered what she was going to say that mattered.

"What is this—" she said at last— "this courage? Is it only doing the things you don't want to do? Would it be staying in the city when I wanted to come up here? Wouldn't that be just stupidity?"

"Guts," he said, "is doing what you have to do, no matter what."

"Then I have it," she said evenly. "My father likes me here, and I like it, too. So I'm going to stay, no matter what."

Slade felt suddenly inadequate, lost in the intricacies of argument, the coolness of her parry and riposte. He even felt a sneaking admiration for her, a small kindling that he stamped out savagely as soon as he realised what it was. Then he turned abruptly and drove through the scrub, pursued by a question that he couldn't answer and yet needed to resolve.

He had told himself he wanted her to go because she might disrupt the camp.

But was that the truth? He wasn't sure. All he knew now was that she disturbed him strangely and reminded him of things best forgotten. He had achieved equanimity before she came. He had decisiveness. But now . . . He couldn't even be sure any longer that she lacked the guts to see a thing through.

She had thrown back his challenge. He increased his pace and fairly burst out of the scrub.

Egil was sitting with Rusty on the ground beside the dead 'roo, waiting patiently. A square thick man with a square face and big flat paddle hands, a competent friendly man.

"I shot him on the wing, like an eagle," he said proudly. "Something scared him."

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Slade bent down and pulled Rusty's short soft ears. "I moved," he grunted. "Got cramp."

Egil nodded solemnly. "I was lucky. Tried for a hip shot and got him in the chest."

"You got him," Slade said. "That's all that matters." He picked up the rifle, lying across a small bluebush. "I'll go over the ridge and try my luck."

"There is no hurry," Egil said. "I have just to cut off the tail. And Baiba is coming now."

Slade said curtly, "I'll go on."

He swung away and angled up the ridge with Rusty on ahead, tail high and nose keen for scent, goanna, 'roo, emu, or rabbit—they were all the same to him. He was a cattle dog by breeding; no specialist, but an enthusiastic amateur when it came to hunting.

Slade's booted feet slid carefully among the loose betraying stones that littered the slope, his body crouched at bush-top level; his eyes swept and halted and swept on again, searching for the cocked ears and head outline above a bush.

There was nothing on the forward slope, and he looked back before he topped the crest. Egil and Baiba were just starting out, and a band of sunlight broke momentarily through the overcast to touch on them. He saw the light dance in Baiba's hair, and her slender body etched in shadow against the background of the plain.

Then he lifted his gaze with a conscious effort, and far beyond them he could see the camp train. A high caterpillar of a town, with its painted tin roofs and smokestacks, and fore and aft the silver thread of the track, spearing into the great cattle lands and mining territories of the north.

He studied it for a long expansive moment, then wheeled round and resumed his careful advance, his big shoulders a little squarer beneath the wind-jacket, his strong mouth touched by an inward smile. Something always fired a spark within him when he looked at the railroad. The tracks seemed to speak aloud about what it meant to this empty land of wild flowers and gentleness, of malignant gouging rains and searing heat, of dust and sand, of paradise and hell.

It was a project to make men insignificant, he thought. You were part of it, and yet you were an ant. It made Baiba Voitkuns and his feelings about her less than insignificant. And he decided, with a sudden decision born of ridge-top air and the sight of rails biting into virgin plain, that he would tell Egil to send her out as soon as they got back.

It was the only way.

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Egil would probably decide to quit, and for that he would be sorry. He was a good friend and a good man, but the job was bigger than the man.

There were others who could take his place—Chris Vitols of the surveying team, for instance; or Patrick Cleary, the Irishman; or Herman Klein; or Jo Olsen—

Then a cry, half curse, half fright, jerked from his throat as a great tawny shape reared up in front of him. For an instant he was looking right into the 'roo's scared eyes, seeing the fear-twitched muzzle, sensing and sharing the instant panic. Then the 'roo took off, coming straight for him. He threw himself sideways and down just in time, and the great animal hurtled past, still going up.

He rolled over, holding the rifle clear, and jumped to his feet. The 'roo touched earth thirty, maybe forty feet away and bounced up again like a huge and eccentric rubber ball, great hind legs tucked in and tail streaming out behind.

Slade hugged the rifle to his shoulder, swung it in a short arc, getting just ahead of the deep thick chest, aiming a little low to compensate for the downhill angle. Then he gently squeezed off the shot.

It went home. He saw a cloud of dust puff out from under the right shoulder, but that was all. The 'roo didn't deviate an inch in flight. It landed and took off again with smooth, gigantic power. Slade sent another shot after it too quickly, and missed. Then he sighted in a third, swung, started to squeeze—and a tree was in his sights. He cursed. The 'roo had gained the light scrub that skirted the bottom of the ridge. He lowered the rifle to arm's length and slowly straightened up, his eyes still running through the trees.

It was the biggest kangaroo he had ever seen, a Great Red, six, perhaps seven feet tall. It had towered over him, and he shuddered slightly as he felt again the rush of wind, the sense of power as it flew at and over him.

He heard Rusty make a little whining noise, looked down and saw reproach in the glowing yellow eyes.

"And you can shut up, too," Slade told him, pretending to cuff his ears. "Why didn't you tell me he was there?"

"Martin. You are all right?"

Egil's voice was strained with panting. Slade turned and saw him running down from the crest. Baiba was beside him. Both of them had trouble in their faces.

"We saw you fall," Egil said.

"Came straight at me," Slade said. "Biggest damn 'roo I ever saw."

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" You are all right, though? " Baiba said.

There was the quickness of anxiety in her voice.

Slade heard it and looked more closely. The anxiety was in her face, too, about her tightened lips and in her eyes, shifting as flecks beneath their surface. A warmth crept slowly through his veins, a sense of pleasure. He cut it off abruptly and harshly, embarrassed that she should feel anything for him, troubled that he should be so responsive.

" I'm O.K.," he said stiffly. " Serve me right if I wasn't. I damn near stepped on him."

" Your heart is not in the hunting today," Egil said quietly. He shook his head. " I am sorry."

" Forget it," Slade said.

Egil shrugged. " You hit him when you shoot? "

" One in the chest," Slade said bleakly. " One he can travel with—not like yours."

There had been resignation in that movement of Egil's shoulders, and it worried and accused him. It was as though he sensed that things had gone so badly they couldn't be repaired. Slade didn't dare to look at Baiba. He could feel her eyes on him.

" Well, let's go," he said. " And don't anyone step on him now he's wounded. He won't jump next time. He'll rip."

He wheeled and started down the slope towards the screen of trees, plunging through the pimpled bushes, clattering among the stones because there was no need now for silence. He could hear Egil and Baiba coming after him, and his mind was back with them. Everything was with them and about them. The tracking and destruction of the wounded kangaroo was merely filling in, a chore that you had to do to terminate its suffering.

Could it be true, he wondered, that he was opposed to Baiba because she disturbed him and he did not trust himself? Because he had once given part of himself away and had it thrown back unwanted? Was that the reason he was going to drive her out—and sacrifice her father?

Had he been fair comparing her with Barbara Gillen, saying she had no guts, no courage? Or was that merely a lie for self-protection? There had been no semblance of trouble in the camp since her arrival. But did that mean anything? Trouble could happen anywhere, at any time.

These doubts pounded in his mind, drumming in rhythm with his footfalls as his eyes sought out and found the blood spoor of the 'roo. They were moving on flat grassy ground, through light mulga scrub, with here and there a desert oak. It was routine tracking, without need to interpret signs, to anticipate the path

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of flight and work out interceptions. You just kept on until weakness overcame the quarry.

About two miles on, Slade saw a great splash of scarlet blood and an area of flattened grass. The end was close. The 'roo had hæmorrhaged here and lain down to rest, fear overwhelmed by weariness. Before long they would find him propped against a tree, daring them to come in close where he could rear up on his tail and use his claws. But they wouldn't close in.

A wounded 'roo could disembowel a man with one slash of its hind-leg claws.

"Soon now," Egil said.

"Yes." Slade's eyes were quartering the land ahead, trying to pick up movement among the trees. Then he saw it, a change in the pattern of light about five hundred yards away.

"Rusty." He squatted as the dog bounded in, ears pricked in eagerness. He seized him with both hands and pointed him towards the distant movement.

"Go get him, boy."

The dog raced off, high-tailed and spirited. The 'roo would stop moving once Rusty closed in and stand at bay against a tree until Slade came up and finished him.

"Is it safe for Rusty?" Baiba asked.

"Sure," Slade said. "He must not get in close. He'll bark and run about, and hold the 'roo until we get up."

They were moving forward together for the first time since heading out of camp.

Slade was in the middle with Baiba on his left, and he was sharply almost painfully conscious of her. The air seemed fresher, the grass greener, and the soft earth more springy beneath his striding feet. It annoyed him because it shouldn't have been like that. He had to get rid of her.

"I don't like this much," Baiba said. "It's so—so cold-blooded."

Slade's right hand tightened on the rifle. "No one likes it," he said flatly, "but what can you do? Leave the 'roo to die slowly in pain?"

"Would it hurt more than the fear?" she said.

"I wouldn't know," Slade snapped. "But stay here if you're scared. Climb up a tree and close your eyes."

She threw a quick stabbing glance at him, and looked away. Her cheeks were stained with pink about the high cheekbones; the short, straight nose was pinched in at the nostrils. "I'm not scared," she said. "I'm just being human. You ought to try it some time, instead of always doing what you have to do, no matter what."

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Slade felt the taunt like a whiplash. His face darkened underneath its tan. He stopped, turning, but Egil's hand dropped on his arm.

" Over there," Egil said. " Against the oak."

Slade turned slowly, getting hold of himself. He followed Egil's gaze and saw the kangaroo standing at bay against a straight-trunked desert oak, its great head almost touching the first branches, forelegs tucked in against the barrel chest. It had no eyes for them. All its attention was focused on Rusty.

As the dog rushed in it swayed back, balancing on its great thick tail, ready to spring and use its claws. Rusty turned away and it settled back again. Slade thumbed off the safety-catch and went forward.

" Rusty," he called quietly. " Here, boy. Steady."

Then it all went wrong. Rusty stopped in the middle of a pass, looking back, and the 'roo leapt for him.

Slade risked a snap shot, saw, heard, and even felt it crash home. But it didn't take effect.

The kangaroo lashed out with both hind legs, missed by inches as Rusty rolled away. The dog circled fast while the 'roo was still off balance, got behind and sank his teeth in the tail. The 'roo reared up. Slade dropped to one knee, took careful aim, and pulled the trigger. There was nothing but a dull click in his ear. Misfire. He jerked open the breech and got his finger on the faulty round.

He had it only half out when he saw the 'roo swing up its great tail and thump it on the ground. Rusty lost his grip, tumbled, and the 'roo opened up a gash on his front shoulders as it tried for the disembowelling stroke.

The dog yelped in pain and rage. He rushed in again, sprang for the 'roo's flank and missed. He wasn't powerful enough; he would get himself killed in seconds.

" Rusty! " Slade's voice was high and strident. " Here, Rusty. Here."

Then someone brushed past him, going fast, just as his fingers got the dud round clear. His head jerked up, his eyes stared, and a monstrous silence fell. Baiba Voitkuns was heading straight for that bloody mix-up.

He tried to yell, but the sound stuck far down in his throat. He couldn't fire because she was right in line. He ran out to the left, towards the 'roo, and as he did Baiba flashed almost underneath its paws and grabbed Rusty in her arms. The 'roo moved fast, so fast he didn't see it happen. All he saw was Baiba struggling in its grasp, held tightly to its chest by the forelegs. She still clutched Rusty in her arms.

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Slade raced in then, afraid to fire a shot even from ten yards at that swaying, twisting target. Fear for her was a dry scream in his throat and wings on his heels. But time and distance stood somehow still. He was rushing forward in a vacuum where everything kept a fixed position. He saw the 'roo lean back, weight going on its tail, and the great hind legs retract. His right forefinger moved and a 25.20 slug blasted off.

He saw a gash appear in the wall of reddish pelt; blood poured out. Then he was in, ramming the muzzle of the gun against the chest, pulling the trigger with a frenzy that was part of him and yet a thing apart.

The kangaroo sagged slowly to the ground. Baiba and the dog fell, too, but forward, away from the clutching forelegs that had held them prisoner and now flopped in the boneless, flaccid form of death.

Slade dropped the rifle as he leapt for them and scooped Baiba in his arms. He was on his knees, holding her tight against his chest and his face buried in her hair. The fear that had driven him was still in charge, but now it changed. He began to tremble with it, beginning with a slow unravelling of the knotted muscles deep inside, moving up and out until his arms began to shake.

He lifted his head, showing a face that was curiously streaked with white beneath its tan, the features grim and hard like some native dancing mask.

"You fool," he said hoarsely. "You little fool."

Baiba's face was white, too, but without the grimness and the tension that pulled his all out of shape. Her blue eyes looked into his dark, intense ones, held them and probed, and then her lips moved in a small, slightly tremulous smile.

"I was only doing what I had to do, no matter what," she said faintly. "You ought to know."

Egil sank slowly to his knees beside them. His big chest heaved raggedly as he fought to keep control. His face, naturally pale, was white as chalk. Two swollen veins showed blue against his temples. "Baiba." He breathed her name like a prayer, or like an answer to one. "What is this you had to do? Risk your life for a little dog?"

Baiba sat up and cupped her right hand against his cheek, but the deep blue of her gaze was fixed on Slade. "Father, it was more than that," she said gently. "Ask Martin some time. Martin understands."

"I do," Slade said slowly. "I surely do."

He was kneeling, sitting back on his heels, relaxed yet tense, like a man who has discovered a truth that exalts, resolves his conflicts, but still amazes him.

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All his doubts of her and of himself had been destroyed in the intense blaze of her courage and his fear. Somehow, with the doubts gone, she no longer posed a problem to the camp. All he understood was a new freedom in his mind. And within the freedom a new objective that was as remote from Barbara Gillen as from the moon.

He grinned at Egil. "Right now we'd better get Rusty back to camp and patch that cut," he said. "Later I'll explain."

He knew that the things he had to explain to Egil were not quite ready for the telling yet. There had to be some time to clarify the details.

He looked at Baiba, and she was smiling down at Rusty, stroking his head as though she owed him something.

Slade put out a hand and stroked him too. His hand touched hers, she looked up quickly, and he had an almost overwhelming impulse to kiss her there and then.

But he stopped himself. After all, Egil might be his foreman and his friend, but he was still her father. There were certain formalities to be observed.

Latvians, he understood, were very particular about things like that. In public, anyway.

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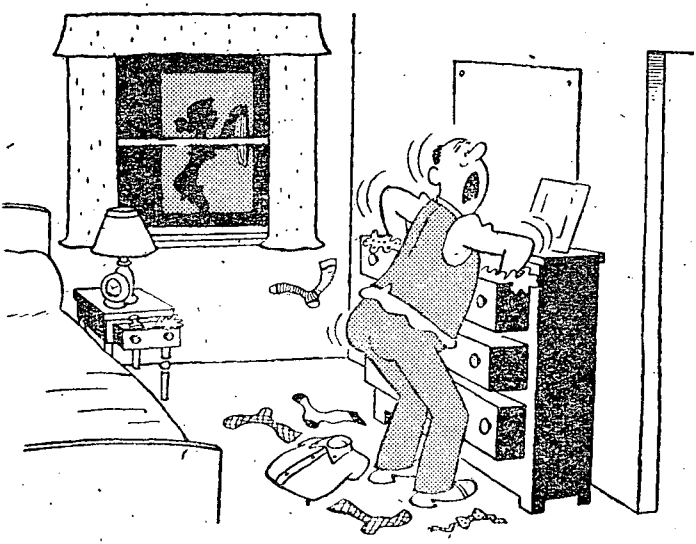

"My glasses, Florence! Have you seen my glasses?"

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Monkey Business

A baboon and a blessing to men . . .

Children, behold the Chimpanzee;
He sits on the ancestral tree
From which we sprang in ages gone.
I'm glad we sprang: had we held on
We might, for aught that I can say,
Be horrid Chimpanzees today.

OLIVER HERFORD, *The Chimpanzee*

Champ Chimp

These thoughts are partly inspired by the antics of Elizabeth, who is sitting opposite me with her face cupped in her feet . . .

Our cousins the apes and monkeys are the only animals possessing both manual dexterity and intelligence; they have already shown that they can perform a wide range of jobs—when they feel like it. In Malaya, many people will be surprised to learn, the pig-tailed macaque has been employed for generations to harvest the coconut crop, by climbing the tall palms and dropping the nuts.

Similar talents were displayed by one of the few chimpanzees with a criminal record—Socrates, trained by his master to burgle New York apartments fifteen stories up . . .

It is not putting too much strain on the imagination to assume that the geneticists could produce a super-ape capable of being trained for such jobs as picking fruit, cleaning up the litter in the park, shoe-shining, collecting the garbage, doing household chores, and even baby-sitting . . .

But I must come back in a hurry from these dreams of a future society. Elizabeth has just managed to open the garage door and is trying to start the car. And that will never do, for she hasn't got her driving licence yet.

ARTHUR C. CLARKE,
Our Dumb Colleagues

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A Priori—

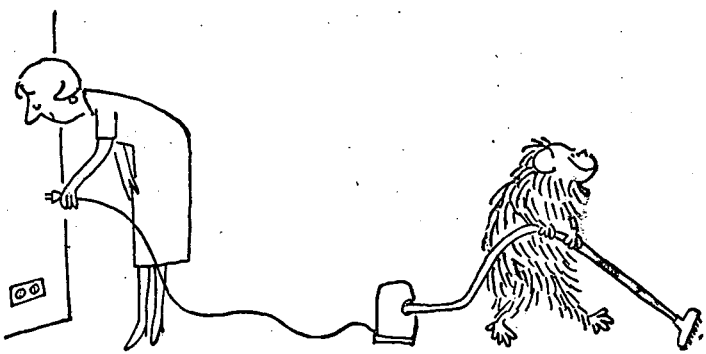
O lovely O most charming pug
Thy graceful air and heavenly mug
The beauties of his mind do shine
And every bit is shaped so fine
Your very tail is most divine
Your teeth is whiter than the snow
You are a great buck and a bow
Your eyes are of so fine a shape
More like a christians than an ape
His cheeks is like the roses blume
Your hair is like the ravens plume
His noses cast is of the roman
He is a very pretty weoman
I could not get a rhyme for roman
And was oblidged to call it weoman.

MARJORY FLEMING, *On a Monkey*, 1803–1811

—Ex Officio

We were not a secret society, we were just merely out hunting monkeys. The way the thing worked was this: monkeys are people in whose breasts rages continuous war between curiosity and caution; my black friends know it, so of course by getting themselves up uncommon queer, they attract monkeyan curiosity . . . Then my black companions threw off their fancy dresses and explained, I am sure with no uncivil intention, that as I was quite the very queerest object they had personally ever seen, they thought I was a heaven-sent addition to a monkey hunt.

Letter from Mary Kingsley, quoted in
CECIL HOWARD'S *Mary Kingsley*



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Union Matter

MONKEYS.—*Writer doing research into the earning capacity of monkeys would be glad to hear from anyone who owns or knows the whereabouts of monkeys who perform tasks normally done by humans . . .*

Advertisement in The Times, Personal Column, Dec. 1956

Upset Otter

. . . On Sunday a collection of 20 finger paintings by a young chimpanzee named Betsy will go on sale. Betsy, who is six years old, has been dabbling in paint for some time, and a number of her canvases have already been sold; one of them entitled "Cabbage Worms," fetched $40, and others, "Otter in Avalanche" and "Inferno," were bought for $25 each.

Report in The Times, March 1957

Who'll Drill the Mandrill?

. . . On the long-term view, it is a bleak lookout for the artists. They have enough to do keeping the wolf from their own door without having to worry about excluding mandrills from the Leicester Galleries.

The Times, 4th Leader, March 1957

Simian Stylites

Sir,—On what evidence do you assert in your leading article of March 13, that Betsy is the first ape of any kind to achieve recognition as a painter? I would have thought that many of the paintings exhibited in London in recent years could have been attributed with confidence to the Simian School.

R. DALLAS BRETT, *Letter in The Times, March* 1957

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EYE WITNESS

" As big as this," said Anaqoq, drawing a size in the snow

BY JOHN D. STEWART

YES, now we are to build a cairn to the memory of the great Chief of our tribe, the hunter Anaqoq, the man who returned to us from the sea. We are going to build a cairn at Larsen Inlet where he died, the Pastor says, so that his name shall live in our tribe for ever.

So many years have passed since the Day of the Return that of all those who greeted Anaqoq on that day I am the only one who still lives to tell of it. The rest are dead and silent now, and so it was that the Pastor had to come to me.

The Pastor had to come to me, Old Sordaq, whose toes have all been taken away by the frost, and who waits for his meat and hints for his tobacco. He came, and he asked me to tell the people of the return of Anaqoq.

The people all came to the Meeting House where I sat with the Pastor waiting to begin the tale. They made much talk and laughing. I did not listen to this talk, for I was thinking of how I should tell them of the days of the great Chief, so long ago and so strange to these young people.

In those days there were no ships and no trade, so that a man could know no more than he saw around him—that, and what his father told him. The world of our tribe was small then, but it had much wisdom in it, for everything we knew we knew well and understood, and small things were done with great care, and a man could rest his mind as his body worked.

But how could I say these things to the people of today?

The Pastor stood up and raised his white hand for silence, and one man rose and said, " Greetings, Old Sordaq. Now we are ready. Tell us about the great Chief, Anaqoq—of his wanderings and of his return."

And so I began to tell them.

He was the Chief of this tribe, I said, when I was a little boy like that boy over there. He had two wives, who were sisters, and one of them was barren. The other bore him four children,

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but they are all dead long ago. One the wolves took, one drowned from his kayak, and two died young from sickness. Many children died in those days, I said.

All sat silent, thinking of this, so I went on more boldly.

Anaqoq was the best of all hunters. He was the man we trusted most, and so the first chance was always his—the first harpoon in every walrus. There were no guns, so we killed bear, seal, musk ox, walrus, and white whale with the spear and the harpoon.

But Anaqoq was the only man who never made a false throw or came to his igloo unladen.

Since he had the first throw he had also the first cut: the head, guts, and forequarter were his by right. He killed far more than his wives could eat, so he gave freely to the lesser hunters and to the old men. So it was that we made him our Chief.

Here I stopped to drink water, and a man called out, "A walrus drew him down into the sea!"

That is so, I told them. There was a great walrus that he harpooned, and as the line ran out he saw the dogs had bitten it through, so that it was free of the bladder-float. Then he did a thing that no man had ever dared to do before. He caught the line in his hand.

"What happened?" the people cried. "What happened then?"

Why then, I said, the walrus drew him down to its pasture on the dark bed of the sea, where no man had ever been. But he held the line, and paid it out, and came to the light again. Then he gave the line to his brother, and lay across his kayak and died of the cold. But later he returned to life.

They cheered at this, and shouted, "And he killed a bear in a cave!"

So he did. I told them of that, too.

A wounded she-bear with a cub in a cave of ice, with room for one man to go in to her. One man only, I told them. Who do you think went in?

"Anaqoq!" they all shouted together, and then they laughed with pure joy—and I with them—that a man could be so brave.

When they were silent I spoke again.

And whatever Anaqoq did, I said, we knew that he told us of it truly.

There were no lies in those harder times, for it was known that one lie could lead to the death of many men. A lie was the greatest wrong we knew, and a liar would have been killed at once to save men from his perilous tongue. And even if there had been lies in our tribe, they would have come last from our

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Chief—or so we thought—for this man could take no lie into his head, nor knew any lies to tell.

I rested again and drank water, and the people waited. I thought of how these things had changed since the days of Anaqoq.

Lies seem small wrongs now, like the wrongs of little children. Our traders travel to the Fur Post with their mouths full of lies, and come back with them full of laughter and brown sugar. Their wives, who are left behind with the young men, paint their love-bites with charcoal and greet the returning travellers with lies about their chastity.

I am old, so that I stay behind as well, and I know of these things. Ah, Anaqoq, my Chief, you died at a good time!

"Tell us how Anaqoq went away!" they called to me, and so I began again.

Anaqoq went far out on the sea ice to the blow-hole of a bull seal, and when the seal came up he speared it through the neck and threw it on the ice and killed it. He tied his lines to its jaw and drew it homewards across the ice, but then he came to open water. He moved along the edge of the floe, but it was all wide water without an ice pan, nor any floe to be seen beyond. He came to a place where the waves were breaking against the edge of his floe, and then he knew that he was drifting out into the sea to his death.

Anaqoq did not despair. He walked and ran so that the cold could not kill him. He sang to the sea and the wind, and he sang to the dead seal, and drank its blood, and ate it piece by piece.

It was early winter, and dark all day, so that he could not tell how many days he drifted.

When the ship came upon him he had eaten all the seal—which was a bull and a fat one—except for the pelt and the skull and a few bones, so he must have been more than two weeks on the floe—yet he lived.

The ship took him to a distant land, and he never knew what land it was. But we know now.

"It was Denmark," a little boy called from my feet. So it was.

We waited a whole year for him to come back—until the seals came to the blow-holes again. Then we declared him dead, for no man had ever come back from the sea after a month. We mourned him for five days, every man in his igloo with the fore-end of his sledge pointed at his door.

The dogs lay silent under the snow five days, all the men lay idle, the women ceased to sew, and even the little children stopped their play.

Then we put Anaqoq out of our minds for ever, but the people

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delayed to make another chief. We had no other man like that.

"But he came back!" the people cried, for they do not like to be sad for long. "He came back to the tribe at Larsen Inlet! Now tell us of his return!"

"Yes, indeed he came back!" I shouted to them, and they laughed and cheered with joy. Here I found myself weeping, which I did not wish them to see, so I called out once more very loud, "Back he came! Safe and strong! Back he came from the sea!"

At this they all laughed and cheered again, so that I had a little time to compose myself before I spoke of his return.

It was after two years and three months that he came back. It was in January, I remember, for I could just make out the colours of our dogs. There came a great ship—the first we had ever seen—and she lay far offshore, and a boat came out of her and rowed to the edge of the ice. Then Anaqoq leapt on to the ice, and he waved to the boat, and it went away.

We saw him and we knew him at a great distance. His wives ran into their igloo to prepare themselves for him. The rest of us watched him coming, but we worked on, as our custom was, so as not to shame him with our love.

When he reached the hard land he called out, "Sainak!"—At last I am here.

And we answered him, "Assukiak!"—We are glad to have you here.

Then he walked among us, and we knew we must not stop him or ask him where he had been. He showed no concern about his wives nor asked us of them, lest he might offend the seals who do not like to be hunted by persons of weak character. By this we knew that he was still a hunter.

He went to his igloo and entered it and built the snow door behind him. He stayed in there a good time with his wives, and no one was surprised at this.

It was dull weather that day and the air was so damp that the seals could hear for miles. For that reason there was no hunting, and so we feasted. We ate the hearts and livers of walrus and maktak of narwhal skin, and all the best things from our caches. We ate freely for we knew that our great hunter was back and that there would be plenty of meat for ever. We ate for hours, and then some sang and some danced. After that we told tales, so that there came a time when Anaqoq could nurse his story in his belly no longer—and this was the time we had awaited . . .

First he told us of his journey on the floe, as I have told it

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already. Then he told such tales as were heard in wonder. On the ship, he said, he had eaten soft white stuff with no taste at all, and fat plants and roots, and berries as big as a man's fist. The seamen killed ten whales in one day with a tube which blew out a harpoon at a man's bidding. He had slept in a bed made of iron hooks, and there was not a man on the ship who could speak any word that he knew, yet they understood each other.

They took him to warm waters, he said, where there was sun and light in the winter, and they brought him to an inlet where the ships flocked together like auks on the cliff, and howled to each other all night long.

They took him on to the land there, and he saw sledges that went forward without dogs on runners that rolled round and round. There were porpoises that walked on the dry land, digging and grunting, with skin the colour of a woman's. They were easy to catch, and their meat was very good.

There was no end to his tales! Musk oxen he had seen—some of them as tall as a man—and they stood still and let themselves be milked by young girls. There were plants as thick as a man, and people swimming in the sea naked, and birds that walked into a man's house and laid their eggs for him. Some of the men there had so much meat that they laid it out to invite everyone to take it.

Above all, he had seen whole houses made of timber.

Many of the tribe thought that he had returned with the sickness of solitude in his brain, as lost men often do.

But Pituaq, our Wise Man, did not think this, and he was greatly troubled at what he had heard Anaqoq say. When the Chief told of the houses made of timber the Wise Man asked him, "Whole houses, did you say?"

"Yes," said Anaqoq, "and some of them had seven rooms."

"All made of timber?"

"Yes, and as big as this," said Anaqoq, and he drew a size on the snow. At this many people fell silent. You know why.

"Because there was no timber then," a boy said. "The sledges were all of walrus bones with cross-pieces of caribou horn, and the summer tents were framed with the jawbones of whales."

That is so, I told the boy. There was no timber but a little driftwood which came when it wished, and we used to treasure that for the hafts of spears and harpoons, and hand it from father to son. It was well known that there was not enough timber in the world to build one house.

And so Pituaq said to Anaqoq, "You went away honoured as no other man, but you have come back to lie to us."

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Each man agreed with this, and Anaqoq was put on his trial before the tribe, and the Wise Man said to him, " What will you say to us now? "

" That I have told the truth," said Anaqoq. " Is there any man here who ever heard me tell a lie before? " No man spoke.

" It is then a greater horror to the tribe that you should make a beginning of it now," Pituaq told him.

" I have told the truth," said Anaqoq.

" No man tells lies about nearby bears," another man said. This was a proverb and very true, for other men can go and see the tracks—or no tracks—for themselves. " But those who have been far away," the man said, " may think that they can tell lies with safety."

All agreed with this, too.

" I ask you to take back this lie," said Pituaq, as Anaqoq sat silent. " It is a young lie and has been caught at birth. It has harmed no one yet—except the liar. Let the lie be killed and let the liar live."

All waited for Anaqoq to speak, but he said nothing.

Then an old man told of the ancient braggart lie which had led men to their deaths, of the long journey into starvation after caribou which had not passed.

But when he had finished, Anaqoq sat silent still.

At last Pituaq asked him once more, as the custom was, " You saw whole houses made of timber? "

And Anaqoq raised his eyes and answered him, " I saw whole houses made of timber."

" Will you say, now, that this is a lie? "

" I cannot say so," said Anaqoq. " I have spoken the truth." These were the last words that our Chief spoke to us.

They said no farewell to him, nor showed any grief—it was not the custom then to do so. Two men stepped up to him and pulled his anorak up over his face, gently. They put a sealskin sledge-line round the anorak where his neck was, and took two turns, and pulled each end of the line and tightened it.

Anaqoq made no sound, nor even raised a hand to save himself.

The men then looked to Pituaq, and Pituaq looked all round the tribe, and then he nodded to the two men, and they put their weight on the line so that the knots in it spun until they could not be seen.

The men lay back on the line and thrust their boots into the snow, and then Anaqoq raised one hand. He should have been senseless by that time, so Pituaq told them to slacken off.

Then they saw that his anorak was of some strange, thick hide and stiffened with frost so that it had held the line from

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his throat. They pulled it off over his head and he sat there pale and naked, but still he would not resist because he knew the law. He sat like a musk ox beside a wounded comrade, waiting to be killed.

They went into his igloo and brought another anorak—one of blue fox, old and soft—and they put this over his head. They put the line round this and lay back—two men to each end. Soon his body sagged on the line, but they pulled for a long time more, for no one wished to face the Chief alive again. It is well known that even the dogs will not eat a dead brother until he freezes.

At last they sent us—the children—away and then they uncovered his face and he was dead for all time.

They buried him on top of the cliff at Larsen Inlet where we are going to build the cairn—I will show you the place. They put some stones on him to hinder the wolverine, but there was no mourning this time. He knew the law and the penalty, and he himself chose to pay it.

There was a great silence when I stopped speaking, and then someone cried out, "You were wrong!"

Then many others took it up angrily, and called, "You were wrong! You were wrong!"

Yes, we were wrong, I told them—when I could. Very soon afterwards we knew that we had been wrong.

More whalers came after that, and they took skins from us and brought us timber. Now we all sit here in a house made of wood, and there are many more. But no one knew that in the days of which I speak.

Then the Pastor rose and told them that I was only a little child on the Day of the Return, and had no voice in the killing of Anaqoq. Also, he said, there was no wrong in this killing, for it had been in accordance with the law at that time—when no better law was known. It was an error, he said, and a sad thing, but not a wicked thing, for they had believed that they did what was right.

"This man, Sordaq," said the Pastor, and he laid his hand on me, "this man is the living cairn, for the memory of Anaqoq lives on in him alone. He has built for you a cairn of words, true and round and well put together. When we go to Larsen Inlet to build our cairn, this man, Sordaq, shall watch the work and see that it is well done and worthy." Then he thanked me for telling them the story.

We are starting soon with the cairn—as soon as the light grows strong enough.

I shall see that it is well built, with every stone graded in its

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place—large ones at the bottom, small ones at the top, and every one with its mossy side upwards.

When all is finished the Pastor will bless the cairn, and bless Anaqoq, too; and I am to stand behind him and hold Anaqoq's old spear and harpoon. Then, when the Pastor tells me to, I am to place them, crossed, at the foot of the cairn. I shall do this with very great care.

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WHAT CHEER?

Eskimos are the most cheerful people in the world, yet have the least to be cheerful about.—News item.

Consider, please, the Eskimo,
Up in the land of ice and snow,
Who lives on seal meat, tough as rubber,
And, if he's lucky, bits of blubber.

No picture window in his house,
No picture, either, is his spouse,
Who is so bundled up in fur,
He knows not what is clothes, what her.

And yet the Eskimo lad's happy,
So is his Mom and so's his Pappy,
And oft with glee is heard to shout,
Though you may wonder what about.

Here's why, my friends. Although he's chill.
He needs no tranquillising pill.
His igloo, though it may look quaint,
Stays white without a coat of paint.

No TV set like yours and Herschel's,
He's spared the horrors of commercials,
And, without car, he needn't face
The problem of a parking place.

He hears no warlike fife and drums,
The income tax man never comes,
And if he hates to rise at day,
Well, morning's months and months away.

RICHARD ARMOUR

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WORKER IN SANDALWOOD

He laid his finger lightly
on the empty corners of the cabinet

BY MARJORIE PICKTHALL

YOU who read this story may please yourselves, siding either with the curé, who says Philippe dreamt it all and did the carving himself in his sleep, or with Madame.

I am sure that Philippe thinks it is true, and so does Madame, but then she has the cabinet with the birds and the lilies and roses carved at the corners, and the wood, ageing, takes on a golden gleam as of immemorial sunsets: that pale red wood, heavy with the scent of the ancient East, the wood that Philippe loved.

It was the only wood of that kind which had ever been seen in Terminaison. Pierre L'Oreillard brought it into the workshop one morning; a small heavy bundle wrapped in sacking, and then in burlap, and then in fine soft cloths. He laid it on a pile of shavings and unwrapped it carefully, and a dim sweetness filled the dark shed and hung easily in the thin winter sunbeams.

Pierre L'Oreillard rubbed the wood respectfully with his knobbly fingers. "It is sandalwood," he explained to Philippe, "a most precious wood that grows in warm countries. Smell it, imbécile. It is sweeter than cedar. It is to make a cabinet for old Madame at the big house."

Philippe laid down his plane, blew on his stiff fingers, and shambled slowly over to the wood. He was a great clumsy fellow of fourteen, dark-faced, very slow of speech, dull-eyed, and uncared for. He was clumsy because it is impossible to move gracefully when you are growing very big. He was dull-eyed because all eyes met his unlovingly. But his heavy young hands could carve flowers and birds with an artist's skill, as the curé pointed out.

Julien has a tobacco jar carved with pine cones and squirrels, and the curé has a pipe that I have seen, whose bowl is a moccasin flower. But it is all very long ago. And facts in these lonely

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villages easily become transfigured, touched upon their grey with a golden gleam.

"Thy hands shall smooth the wood, nigaud, and I shall render it beautiful," muttered Pierre L'Oreillard, and went off to drink brandy at the Cinq Châteaux.

Philippe knew that the making of the cabinet would fall to him, as most of the other work did. He touched the strange sweet wood, and at last laid his cheek against it, while the fragrance caught his breath. "How beautiful it is," said Philippe, and for a moment his eyes glowed and he was happy.

Then the light passed, and with bent head he shuffled back to his bench through a foam of white shavings curling almost to his knees.

"Madame will perhaps want the cabinet next week, for that is Christmas," said Philippe, and fell to work harder than ever, though it was so cold in the shed that his breath hung like a little silver cloud and the steel stung his hands.

There was a small window to his right through which, when it was clear of frost, one looked on Terminaison—and that was cheerful and made one whistle. But to the left, through the chink of the ill-fitting door, there was nothing but the forest and the road dying away in it, and the trees moving heavily under the snow. Yet, from there came all Philippe's dumb dreams and slow reluctant fancies, which he sometimes found himself able to tell—in wood, not words.

The brandy was good at the Cinq Châteaux; Pierre L'Oreillard gave Philippe plenty of directions but no further help with the cabinet.

"That is to be finished for Madame on the festival, gros escargot!" said he, cuffing Philippe's ear furiously. "Finished, and with a prettiness about the corners, hearest thou, ourson? I suffer from a delicacy of the constitution and a little feebleness in the legs these days, so that I cannot handle the tools. I must leave this work to thee, gâcheur. See it is done properly, and stand up and touch a hand to thy cap when I address thee, orvet, great slow-worm."

"Yes, monsieur," said Philippe wearily.

It is hard, when you do all the work, to be cuffed into the bargain, and fourteen is not very old. He went to work on the cabinet with slow, exquisite skill, but on Christmas Eve he was still at work, and the cabinet unfinished. It meant a thrashing from Pierre if the morrow came and found it still unfinished, and Pierre's thrashings were cruel. But it was growing into a thing of perfection under his slow hands, and Philippe would not hurry over it.

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" Then work on it all night, and show it to me completed in the morning, or thy bones shall mourn thy idleness," said Pierre, with a flicker of his little eyes. And he shut Philippe into the workshop with a smoky lamp, his tools, and the sandalwood cabinet.

It was nothing unusual. The boy had often been left there before to finish a piece of work overnight while Pierre went off to his brandies. But this was Christmas Eve, and he was very tired.

The cold crept into the shed, and even the scent of the sandalwood could not make him dream himself warm. The roof cracked sullenly in the forest. There came upon Philippe one of those awful, hopeless despairs that children know. It seemed to be a living presence that caught up his soul and crushed it in black hands.

" In all the world, nothing! " said he, staring at the dull flame. " No place, no heart, no love! O kind God, is there a place, a love for me in another world? "

I cannot endure to think of Philippe shut up despairing in the workshop with his loneliness, his cold, and his hunger, on the Eve of Christmas. He was but an overgrown, unhappy child; and for unhappy children no aid, at this season, seems too divine for faith. So Madame says, and she is very old and very wise.

Philippe even looked at the chisel in his hand, and thought that by a touch of that he might lose it all, all, and be at peace, somewhere not far from God; only it was forbidden. Then came the tears, and great sobs that sickened and deafened him, so that he scarcely heard the rattling of the latch.

At least, I suppose it came then, but it may have been later. The story is all so vague here, so confused with fancies that have spoilt the first simplicity. I think that Philippe must have gone to the door, opening it upon the still woods and the frosty stars, and the lad who stood outside must have said, " I see you are working late. May I come in? " or something like that.

Philippe brushed his sleeve across his eyes, and opened the door wider with a little nod to the other to enter.

Afterwards he told the curé that for a moment he had been bewildered. Dully blinking into the stranger's eyes, he lost for a flash the first impression of youth and received one of age or sadness. But this also passed and he knew that the wanderer's eyes were only quiet, very quiet like the pools in the wood where the wild does drink. As he turned within the door, smiling at Philippe and shaking some snow from his fur cap, he did not seem more than sixteen or so.

" It is very cold outside," he said. " There is a big oak tree on

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the edge of the fields that has split in the frost and frightened all the squirrels asleep there. Next year it will make an even better home for them. See what I found!" He opened his fingers and showed Philippe a sparrow lying in his palm.

"Pauvrette!" said Philippe. "Pauvrette; is it dead then?" He touched it with a gentle forefinger.

"No," answered the stranger, "it is not dead. We'll put it here among the shavings, not far from the lamp, and it will be well by morning."

He smiled, and it seemed to Philippe as if the scent of sandal-wood had deepened, and the lamp-flame was burning more clearly. The stranger's eyes were quiet.

"Have you come far?" asked Philippe. "It is a bad season for travelling."

"A long way," said the other, "a long, long way. I heard a child cry . . ."

"There is no child here," answered Philippe, shaking his head. "Monsieur L'Oreillard is not fond of children; he says they cost too much. But if you have come far you must be cold and hungry, and I have no food or fire. At the Cinq Châteaux you will find both."

The stranger looked at him again, and Philippe thought his face was familiar. "I will stay here," he said. "You are at work very late and you are unhappy."

"Why," answered Philippe, rubbing again at his cheeks and ashamed of his tears, "most of us are sad at one time or another, the good God knows. Stay here and welcome if it pleases you, and you may take my bed—it is just a pile of balsam boughs and an old blanket up in the loft. But I must work at this cabinet: the drawer must be finished, and the handles put on, and these corners carved—all by the holy morning, or my wages will be paid with a stick."

"You have a hard master, if he would pay you with blows upon the morning of the feast."

"He is hard enough," said Philippe, "but once he gave me sausages and white wine, and once, in the summer, melons. If my eyes stay open I shall have finished this by the morning, but I am very sleepy. Stay by me an hour or so and tell me of your journeying, so that the time will pass more quickly."

"I will tell you about the country where I was a child," answered the stranger.

While Philippe worked, he told of sunshine and dust; of the shadows of vine leaves on the flat white walls of a house; of doves on the flat roof; of flowers that come in the spring,

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crimson and blue, and the white cyclamen in the shadow of the rocks; of olive, myrtle, and almond; until Philippe's slow fingers ceased working and his sleepy eyes blinked wonderingly.

"See, friend," he said at last, "you have told of such wonderful things that I have listened and done little work for the last hour. Now the cabinet will never be finished, and I shall be beaten."

"Let me help you," said the other. "I also was bred a carpenter."

At first Philippe would not, fearing to trust the sweet wood out of his own hands, but at length he allowed the stranger to fit in one of the drawers. So deftly was the work done that Philippe pounded his fists on the bench in admiration. "You have a real knack," he cried. "It seemed as if you held the drawer in your hands a moment, and—hey-ho! it was into its place."

"Let me fit in the other drawers while you go and sleep awhile," said the wanderer. So Philippe curled up among the shavings, and the stranger fell to work upon the cabinet of sandalwood.

Here begins what the curé will have it is a dream within a dream. Sweetest of dreams ever dreamt, if that is so. Sometimes I am forced to think with him, but again I see as clearly as with old Madame's eyes, that have not seen the earthly light for twenty years. And with her and Philippe, I say, "Credo."

Philippe said that he lay upon the shavings in the sweetness of the sandalwood, and was very tired. He thought of the country where the stranger had been a boy—of the flowers on the hills; of the silver leaves of aspen and poplar; of the golden flowering anise, and the golden sun upon the dusty roads—until he was warm.

All the time through these pictures he was aware of that other boy with the quiet eyes at work upon the cabinet, smoothing, fitting, polishing.

He does better work than I, thought Philippe, but he was not jealous.

And again he thought, It is growing towards morning. In a little while I will get up and help him. But he did not, for the dream of warmth and the smell of the sandalwood held him in a sweet drowse. Also he said that he thought the stranger was singing as he worked, for there seemed to be a sense of music in the shed, though he could not tell whether it came from the other boy's lips or from the shabby old tools as he used them, or from the stars.

The stars are much paler, thought Philippe, and soon it will

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be morning, and the corners are not carved yet. I must get up and help this kind one in a moment. Only I am so tired, and the music and the sweetness seem to wrap me and hold me close, so that I cannot move.

He lay quite still, and behind the forest there shone a pale glow of colour that was neither green nor blue, while in Terminaison the church bells began to ring.

Day will soon be here, thought Philippe, immovable in that deep dream of his, and with the day will come L'Oreillard and his stick. I must get up and help, for even yet the corners are not carved.

But he did not get up.

Instead, he saw the stranger look at him again, smiling as if he loved him, and lay his finger lightly on the four empty corners of the cabinet.

Philippe saw the surface of reddish wood ripple as clouds when the wind goes through the sky. And out of it sprang forth small birds, and above them the lilies, and even while Philippe looked the Christmas roses were fashioned, delicate as the lilies, and settling back into the sweet reddish-brown wood.

Then the stranger smiled again, laid all the tools neatly in order and, opening the door quietly, went away.

Philippe lay still among the shavings for a time, and then he crept slowly to the door.

The sun, not yet risen, set its first beams upon the delicate mist of frost afloat beneath the trees, and soon all the world was aflame with splendid gold.

Far away down the road a dim figure seemed to move amid the glory, but the glow and the splendour were such that Philippe was blinded. His breath came sharply as the glow beat in great waves on the wooden shed, on the foam of shavings, on the cabinet with the small birds and the lilies and the Christmas roses carved at the corners.

He was too pure of heart to feel afraid. But, "Blessed be the Lord," whispered Philippe, clasping his slow hands, "for He hath visited and redeemed His people. But who will believe?"

Then the sun of Christ's day rose gloriously, and the sparrow came from his nest among the shavings and shook his wings to the light.

★ ★ ★

Mankind has a tendency to prefer to die on its feet rather than live on its knees.

A. DICKSON WRIGHT,
Vice-President of the Royal College of Surgeons

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CLOSE SHAVE

A boatload of rowdy young people glided under the arch below

BY MARTIN ARMSTRONG

MAJOR SIMPKINSON, retired from the Army and a widower for the past ten years, lived in a third-storey flat in Lincoln's Inn where the daily visits of Mrs. Dick kept him perfectly comfortable.

He was a friendly and benevolent person, deeply concerned for the welfare of his fellow men. At his club, where he lunched, dined, and spent an hour or so in the library, he was a general favourite. The worst that any of the members could say of him was that he was a bit of an old stick-in-the-mud.

This was true.

He preferred books and papers to the wireless, ocean liners to airliners, open coal fires to gas and electric fires, and trains to cars, even if the train journey involved several changes and took longer than the journey by road.

To all who recommended newfangled contraptions the Major had an unfailing reply, " When all's said and done, the old is better."

It was therefore with an air of triumph that young Crabtree announced one day in the club smoking-room that he had converted the Major to a safety-razor.

It had happened like this. He had recently come upon the Major sunk in an easy chair and hiding behind the paper, from which he had emerged with a large tuft of cottonwool stuck to the left side of his chin.

" Hullo, Major," Crabtree had shouted in his bright, jocular way, " been in a scrap, or are you growing a beard? "

The Major beamed at him a little sheepishly. " Neither, my dear fellow! Neither! The fact is, I gave myself rather a nasty gash when I was shaving this morning. You know how it is—a sudden, sharp pain, and next moment I was bleeding like a pig."

" What sort of razor do you use? "

" What sort? The right sort, of course," and, as Crabtree might have guessed if he'd stopped to think, the right sort was the old cut-throat.

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Crabtree dropped into the next chair and leaned earnestly forward. "Now look here, Major; why not try a safety-razor? You can shave with them with your eyes shut."

The Major beamed again. "But I don't want to shave with my eyes shut."

"Well, perhaps not," said Crabtree, "but you want to shave without cutting yourself."

"Granted!" said the Major. "Granted! But, when all's said and done . . ."

"Yes, yes, I know: the old's a damned sight worse. If it wasn't, you wouldn't be sitting here looking like a billygoat reading a newspaper. You know, you don't look your best in a beard, Major; it doesn't suit you.

"Now listen to me. I'm not asking you to do anything rash: I'm not asking you to go out and buy a safety-razor. All I ask is that you let me lend you one, with a few blades, and give it a fair trial. It's not as if you were one of these pig-headed old buffers who—well, you know what I mean."

It was that last phrase that did it. The Major couldn't very well disagree and so, by putting it like that, Crabtree had forced the safety-razor on him, and the Major promised, into the bargain, to give it a fair trial.

And a few days later he had to admit that there was something to be said for the thing.

Secretly he was delighted with it, as pleased as a child with a new toy, and he went out and bought one for himself and returned Crabtree's with thanks.

But soon he found himself up against a problem: how was he to dispose of the discarded blades? After all, these small, frightfully-sharp bits of steel were nasty, dangerous things. If he were to leave them on the washstand for Mrs. Dick to clear away, she might easily come on one unexpectedly and cut her fingers. He shuddered, and the thing bothered him for some days.

Then, as he stood one morning at his bedroom window with knitted brows and a blade between finger and thumb, his eye fell on the roof-gutter outside.

The very place! Why hadn't he thought of it before? Blades left there would rust away harmlessly and no one would be any the worse.

No sooner had he deposited the blade than a cloud obscured the sun, and soon rain was streaming down the roof into the gutter. The process of disintegration had begun.

A month later his peace of mind was shattered. Returning home from his club, he found an immensely tall ladder reared

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up from the pavement to the roof. A man stood at the bottom of it and another man on top.

"Hullo," said the Major, "what's this?"

"Just a routine job, sir," said the man below. "Cleanin' aht the gutters."

The Major was aghast. He hurried upstairs to his flat and into his bedroom, and there, sure enough, was the other fellow outside the window. He approached the window cautiously, so as not to frighten the man and precipitate him down to certain death, and explained matters.

"Righty-o, sir," said the man. "Thanks for the tip."

For some time after that the Major lived in a state of worry. What on earth was he to do with these confounded blades?

For a moment he considered taking them into one of the public parks and shoving them into the flower-beds. But no! A gardener would hardly fail to get a nasty cut.

The thing began to get on his nerves. It made him forget to enjoy his cigar after lunch.

He even dreamt about it.

But the brilliant suggestions offered by his dreams always proved, when he woke, to be impracticable. It would not really be possible, for instance, to persuade the razorbills at the Zoo to take charge of them, as those in one of his dreams had so obligingly done. In fact, it became clear that the only thing to do with old blades was to keep them, and what more convenient receptacle than an empty matchbox?

Now it must be admitted that the Major was recklessly extravagant with blades: a new one for every shave was his scale, and so it is not to be wondered at that in the course of a few years matchboxes of abnormal weight began to accumulate on his bedroom mantelpiece.

Mrs. Dick, when she went in to make the bed and tidy up, eyed them with tolerant amusement, and after ten years even the Major began to realise that they were not what you would call an ornament. And so, one wet day in January when he was in need of occupation, he transferred the blades to a large cigar-box which they half filled.

His idea was that, when it was full, he would take it with him on one of his journeys abroad and jettison it in mid channel. But he had left time out of his reckoning. Two years before the box was full he had abandoned foreign travel. He was an old man now—seventy-seven last birthday—and he preferred the comforts and routine of home and the club. However, salt water was not imperative, and a simple alternative suggested itself.

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Why not take the box to Waterloo Bridge and, pausing halfway across, drop it into the Thames?

Next morning was fine and he resolved to carry out his plan at once. It wasn't until he was ready to start and went to his bedroom to get the box that he realised what he had let himself in for. For years the box had stood on a stool near his dressing-table and, now that he tried to lift it, he found that the damned thing weighed a ton. Not really a ton, of course, but anyhow—well—a tidy weight.

What was he to do? Take a taxi, obviously. But no sane person calls a taxi and asks to be set down halfway across Waterloo Bridge. No, no! That would never do. But almost at once he had improvised a brilliant subterfuge, and what he said to the driver was, " Last door on the right before you reach the bridge."

And in no time he was there, out of the taxi, and toddling on to the bridge with the box firmly gripped under his right arm. Three times during that brief transit he had to stop and, using both hands, shift the box from one arm to the other.

At last, with a sigh of relief, he heaved it on to the parapet and stood mopping his brow.

He stood there a very long time—twenty minutes, to be exact—because, you see, he was waiting until there was no one on his side of the bridge who would be near enough to witness the curious event. Normal people, after all, don't drop parcels from bridges, and a passer-by or, worse still, a policeman seeing him do so would very properly conclude that he was up to no good.

So, with one hand ready against the side of the box, and head turning now right, now left, he kept watch in both directions. When at last there was a lull in the double stream of pedestrians the Major was more than ready for it.

With eyes still staring along the footway he gave the box a powerful shove.

Although it would have been fun to witness the magnificent plop with which it struck the water, the Major didn't look over the parapet.

On the contrary, he instantly stepped back, in case he should be observed from below, and, much relieved in body and mind, began at once to retrace his steps towards the Strand.

Now it will readily be understood that a solid block of steel over twelve pounds in weight gains a formidable momentum when dropped from the height from which the Major dropped his blades, and in the present instance there was ample proof of this.

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For it so happened that at the very moment when the Major launched his box, a light rowing-boat containing a party of rowdy but innocent young people glided from under the arch below.

It would be untrue to say that the box landed in the bottom of the boat: what it did was simply to pass through it on its way to the bottom of the Thames, and in a few seconds the boat had filled with water and followed it, leaving its passengers, all fortunately uninjured, struggling for their lives in the water. Thanks to prompt rescue-work, and in two cases to a persistent use of artificial respiration, no lives were lost; but it was, as they say, a near thing.

Meanwhile the Major, happily conscious of having fulfilled a duty towards humanity, was toddling along the Strand in the direction of Pall Mall. © Martin Armstrong 1959

★ ★ ★

SOLUTIONS to MARCHPANE AND SUCKETS

on page 31

1. *This year makes fourteen, sent by the people of Oslo. Last year they sent a second because the first got broken in transit.*
2. *Approximately seven million.*
3. *Piedmontese name for a ladybird. The Russians call it God's little cow, and the Germans, God's little horse.*
4. *a. Pacific Ocean; b. U.S.A.; c. Newfoundland; d. Eire; e. Tasmania.*
5. *Every idiot who goes about with "Merry Christmas" on his lips, according to Scrooge.*
6. *Dylan Thomas' uncle.*
7. *The Baddeley Cake is eaten by the cast at Drury Lane Theatre on Twelfth Night, and cut in the theatre boardroom.*
8. *A. A. Milne's friend William.*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD *on page* 144

Across. 1, *Mistletoe.* 6, *Kicks.* 9, *Rill.* 10, *Mace.* 11, *Troll.* 12, *Season.* 13, *Dory.* 15, *Era.* 16, *Axle.* 18, *Esmeralda.* 22, *Uttermost.* 24, *Chic.* 26, *Ice.* 28, *Omar.* 29, *Alloys.* 31, *Orpen.* 32, *Post.* 33, *Maud.* 34, *Niece.* 35, *Telemarks.*

Down. 2, *Itinerant.* 3, *Talus.* 4, *Ermine.* 5, *Orcades.* 6, *Kitty.* 7, *Close.* 8, *Sultana.* 14, *Reel.* 17, *Lie.* 19, *Ash.* 20, *Decoy duck.* 21, *Imam.* 22, *Unicorn.* 23, *Scrooge.* 25, *Wattle.* 27, *Eppie.* 28, *Ounce.* 30, *Lemma.*

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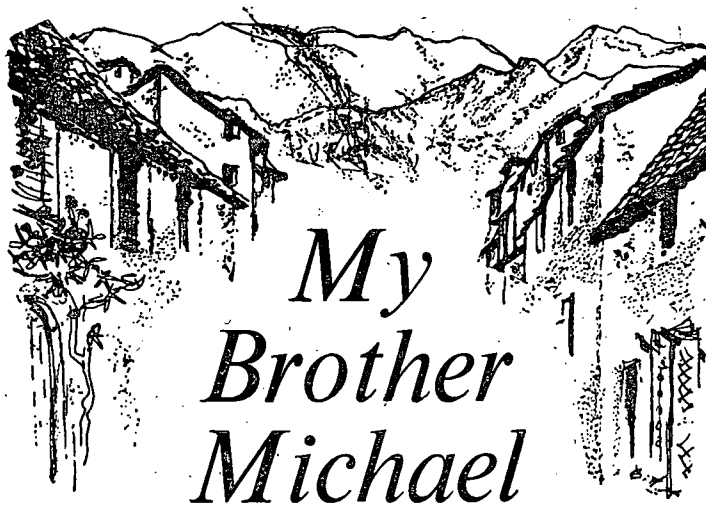

My Brother Michael

By MARY STEWART

In narrow Arachova, I came to grief with the hired car—the car for Monsieur Simon of Delphi—urgently required: a matter of life and death, the little man in the Athens café had told me as he flung the car key on my table and disappeared. He had taken it for granted that I, Camilla Haven (eager to get to Delphi and short of cash) was "Monsieur Simon's girl."

When she did not turn up, I took this ironic dare from the gods of Greece and drove her hired car myself.

The grinning, gesticulating crowd in Arachova fetched a tall Englishman, Simon Lester, to back the car for me, and he—disclaiming all knowledge of Monsieur Simon or Simon's girl—drove me on to Delphi, where he was staying to discover the true facts about his brother Michael, a British Liaison Officer, killed on Parnassus in 1944.

From Stephanos, an old shepherd in Arachova, Simon and I learn of Michael's murder by Angelos Dragoumis, leader of the ELAS guerilla band to which he was attached. The traitor Angelos, or his ghost, has been seen again on Parnassus.

Back in the studio at Delphi the young artist, Nigel, is showing us

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his sketches of a Greek head and a cluster of cyclamen when Danielle, a dark, glamorous French girl bursts in.

Danielle turns mockingly away from the lovesick Nigel, and with a shock of outraged resentment I hear her saying, "I'm Simon's girl—".

DANIELLE was slightly built, of medium height, and had made the most—or the worst, according to the point of view—of her figure by encasing it in drainpipe jeans and a very tight sweater of thin wool, which left nothing to wonder at except how in the world did she get her breasts that shape and into that position. They were very high and very pointed, and the first thing that one noticed about her.

The second was her expression, which was very much the weary Gréco-look of Nigel's portrait of her. Her face was oval, and palely sallow. Her eyes were very big and very black, carefully shadowed with a blend of brown and green that made them look huge and tired. She had long curling lashes that caught the smoke wisping up blue from the cigarette that appeared fixed to her lower lip. She wore pale lipstick, which looked odd and striking with the sallow face and huge dark eyes.

Her hair was black and straight and deliberately untidy, cut in that madly smart way that looks as if it has been hacked off in the dark with a pair of curved nail-scissors. Her expression was one of world-weary disdain.

Her age might have been anything from seventeen to twenty-five. She looked as if she hoped you would put it at something over thirty.

I should perhaps say here that her eyelashes were very long, quite real, and quite beautiful.

This is in case it should be thought that my description of Danielle smacks of prejudice.

The only reason that I had then for prejudice was the expression on Nigel's face as he knelt there on the floor, with his ungainly hands full of the delicate drawings, turning to face the door and saying, "Danielle!" in a cracked young voice that gave him away immediately and very cruelly.

He shoved the drawings clumsily into the folder and got to his feet.

After that first greeting she had ignored him. Nor, after one cool glance, had she looked at me. Her eyes were all over Simon.

She said again, "Hullo."

I don't quite know how she made the simple disyllable sound sexy, but she did.

"Hullo," said Simon, not sounding sexy at all.

He was looking slightly amused, and also wary, which annoyed me.

Nigel said hoarsely, "What are you doing here? I thought you'd left Delphi."

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"I had. But I came back. Aren't you going to ask me in, Nigel dear?"

"Of course. Come in. It's wonderful—I mean I didn't expect you back. Come in. Sit down." He darted forward and dragged out the best chair—the one I had vacated—for her.

But she walked past it towards Simon, who was standing by the window. She went very close to him. "I'm sleeping in the studio, Simon. I got tired of the Tourist Hotel, and anyway I can't afford it now. You don't mind me coming here, do you, Simon?"

"Not in the very least." He looked across her at me. "You'd better be introduced. Camilla, this—as you'll have guessed—is Danielle. Camilla Haven, Danielle Lascaux. I told you that Danielle was here for some time with the School of Archæology. She was Clément's secretary. You probably know the name."

She gave me a brief stare and a barely civil nod. Then she turned, and with what looked like very conscious grace sat down at the opposite end of the bed from me, curled her slim legs up under her, and leaned back against the bed. She tilted her head and sent Simon a long look between narrowed lids.

"So you've been talking about me?"

Nigel said eagerly, "*It was your portrait—the one I did of you.*"

"It's very good, don't you think?" I said. "I recognised you as soon as you came in."

"Yes, I suppose it's a good enough portrait. Are my eyes really as big as that, Nigel?" She was leafing through the drawings: her own portrait; the one we had called the archaic head, with the close curls and tight smile; the lovely cluster of cyclamen; and a drawing I hadn't yet seen, of a man's head and shoulders.

"Flowers?" said Danielle. "Are they paying you to do things like that, Nigel? *Who's this?*"

Her voice had changed on the query so abruptly that I was startled. Simon turned his head, and Nigel almost jumped.

"Who? Oh, that. That's a chap I saw today. We were just saying before you came in that he was rather like an archaic statue, with that—"

"And this one," she said, still in that same acrimonious voice. "This. It's new, isn't it?"

Her hand was tight on the last drawing. I saw the paper begin to tear a very little at the edge, and I leaned forward, saying, "May I?" and took it gently from her hand. She let it go without protest.

I looked at it with interest, and then more sharply. It showed the head and bared throat of a young man. The face was beautiful, but not with Niko's vital and very Greek beauty: this was remote, stern, perhaps a little sad. This was the only portrait I had seen where Nigel had used what I might call his flower technique. It was in his own style: the work was delicate, sure, and arrestingly beautiful.

"Why, Nigel!" I said. "Simon, look at this!"

Danielle let the others fall to the coverlet. She appeared abruptly to have lost interest, only asking, "Did you do those today?"

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" Yes." And Nigel, before Simon had time to do more than glance, swept every drawing back into the folder and shoved it under the bed. He looked flustered, and every bit as resentful as he had done earlier. But Danielle didn't pursue the subject.

She said in her usual slightly bored tone, " Nigel, *are* you going to offer me a drink? "

" Of course." Nigel dived for the bottle of ouzo, put it down again so that it rocked and nearly spilt, then dashed to rinse a tumbler in the basin.

I put my own glass down and made as if to get to my feet. But at that moment I caught Simon's eye, and I thought he shook his head very slightly. I sat back.

He looked down at the girl. " I thought you'd gone, Danielle. Hasn't the dig packed up? "

" Oh, that. Yes. We got to Athens last night, and really I thought it would be rather a *thing* to be back in civilisation again, but I had the most dreary scene with Clément, and then I thought to myself I really might as well be back in Delphi with—" she smiled suddenly, showing very white teeth—" back in Delphi. So here I am."

Nigel said, " You mean you've got the sack? "

" You could call it that." She watched him for a moment through the cigarette smoke, then she turned to me. " Simon told you the polite fiction," she said. " Actually, of course, I was Clément's mistress."

" *Danielle!* "

" My dear Nigel! " She hunched an impatient shoulder. " Don't pretend you didn't know." Then to me, " But he was getting to be a bit of a bore."

" Really? " I said politely.

I thought her look was calculating under the long lashes. " They all do, sooner or later, don't you think? Do you find men bore you, Camilla Haven? "

" Occasionally," I said. " But then, so—occasionally—do women." That one went straight past her.

" I hate women, anyway," she said simply. " But Clément was honestly getting to be the utter end." She blew out a long cloud of smoke, and turned her head to look up at Simon.

" So back I came. But I'll have to sleep here, at the studio. I'm on my own now, so I haven't got the cash for the Tourist Hotel." She smiled slowly, still looking at Simon. " So I'll have to sleep rough."

What it was in her intonation I do not know, but somehow she managed to say the last simple sentence as if it meant sharing a bed with a sadist, and that meant Simon. I felt another spasm of intense irritation.

Nigel was now feverishly drying the tumbler and saying rapidly, " It's wonderful to have you back. You know that. And, of course, you must stay in the studio. We'd love to have you. There's only me and Simon and a Dutch painter—"

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"A Dutch painter?"

Simon said smoothly, "A boy of about twenty who has walked from Jannina and is very, very tired."

She shot him a look up under the fabulous lashes. "Oh." She threw the half-smoked cigarette into the washbasin where it lay smouldering. "Give me another cigarette, Simon."

He obeyed. "Camilla?"

"Thank you," I said.

Nigel pushed past me with a tumbler three parts full of neat ouzo. "Here's your drink, Danielle." His face was anxious, concentrated.

She took it from him and gave him a brilliant smile. I saw him blink, and the flush on the burnt cheekbones deepened. "Nigel darling, I'm glad I came back."

"Danielle—"

"Gia sou, Nigel darling . . . But you're not drinking with me."

It should have been corny, but it wasn't. The expression on the boy's face was naked. Nigel grabbed the bottle and poured an inch or two of liquor into his empty glass.

Danielle yawned, stretched, and turned to Simon. Her fingers ran caressingly down his sleeve. "I'm Simon's girl," she said, in her bored, velvet voice.

Simon looked down through the smoke of his cigarette, and said lazily, "Are you? Delighted, of course. But perhaps, in that case, you'll tell me why you hired a car for me in Athens this morning?"

The hand froze, then withdrew quickly. The thin body twisted on the bed in the first movement she had made unconsciously since she came in. It wasn't sexy in the least. It was plain startled. "What are you talking about?"

"The car you hired in my name this morning. The car you were to have picked up at the café in Omonia Square."

The black eyes held his for a moment, then dropped. "Oh, that." Her voice was calm and husky as usual. "How did you find out?"

"My dear Danielle, you hired it for me, didn't you? And you failed to pick it up. Naturally the people at the café got in touch with me."

"But that's impossible! How did they know?" She was scowling up at him now.

"Never mind how. Tell me why."

She shrugged and drank ouzo. "I wanted to come back to Delphi. I told you that I hired a car. In Greece they never take any notice of a woman, so I gave your name."

"And said it was a matter of life and death?"

"What? Don't be silly. Of course I never said that." She laughed. "You're very dramatic, Simon."

"Perhaps. A dramatic place, this. It gets into the blood. But you did hire the car."

"Yes."

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" And came without it."

" Yes."

" Why? "

I thought unhappily, Because a fool of a girl called Camilla Haven had already taken it. Why couldn't Simon let well alone? Somehow I didn't particularly want to tangle with Danielle Lascaux. And she had every right to be mad with me if she had hired the beastly car—in whatever name—and had then had to come up to Delphi by bus. She didn't look tired and bad-tempered, but it seemed she had arrived very late, and that was presumably my fault.

" Why? " said Simon.

She said sulkily, " Because I got the offer of the jeep from Clément. It was more convenient."

I said, before I thought, " I knew I'd seen you before! You were the girl in the jeep that overtook me just before Thebes. I remember you particularly. You were driving on the wrong side of the road."

She yawned, showing her tongue between her teeth. She didn't even look at me. " Probably. I find it more exciting that way."

Simon said, " Then you got up here well before Camilla did. Where've you been? "

She said, almost bad-temperedly, " What's it matter? Around."

I said, " In Itea? "

Danielle shot upright on the bed. Some ouzo spilt. " What are you talking about? "

I saw a look of surprise touch Simon's face, then the familiar expressionless mask shut down. With the faintest quickening of the blood, I thought, He's interested. This means something.

I said, " I saw the jeep in Itea this evening. It was parked beside a house that stands right away from the village in the olive woods. I hadn't realised till this minute that it was the same one, but now I remember. It had a little tinsel doll hanging on the windscreen—where they usually have the icons. I remember noticing that when you passed me near Thebes."

She wasn't drinking. The smoke from that eternal cigarette crept up in a veil, hiding the expression of her eyes. " This evening? How can you be so sure? Wasn't it dark? "

" Oh yes. But there was a man with a torch tinkering with the engine, and the light caught the tinsel. Then the lamps were lit in the house."

" Oh." She drank a gulp of neat ouzo. It didn't appear to affect her. " Well, I expect it was the same jeep. I was down there, with—someone I know." Again that intonation, that glance up towards Simon. Nigel was watching her like a lost dog. I thought it was some—surprising—impulse of mercy that made her add, " I always go down to Itea in the afternoons. I've done it for weeks. I go to swim. Nigel knows that."

Nigel responded instantly, almost as if the last sentence had been a plea of proof. " Of course I know. But—did you really go there today before you even came up here? "

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"Uh-huh." She gave him a narrow, glinting smile. "You were out, weren't you?"

"Yes."

I thought she watched him for a second before she turned back to me. "And you, Camilla Haven? *You* went down to Itea first, before you came up here?"

"I came up here an hour ago. I'm only visiting Delphi."

"But you went straight to Itea."

The words sounded so much like an accusation that I said quickly, "I called at the hotel first." Then I added, "I went down to Itea to find the hirer of the car."

There was a little silence. "The—hirer of the car?" repeated Danielle.

"I brought the car up from Athens," I said. "I was looking for the Monsieur Simon who was alleged to be wanting it."

Danielle blew out a small cloud of smoke and leaned back against the head of the bed, regarding me through it. "I—see. You brought my car up here? You?"

"Yes," I said unhappily. "I was in the café when the man from the garage came, and he mistook me for you. He gave me the keys and told me it was a matter of life and death. Monsieur Simon wanted the car at Delphi as soon as possible. He vanished, leaving me with the key and no idea of the address of the garage. I didn't know what to do, but I wanted to come here myself, and—well, he'd been so insistent that it was a matter of life and death that—"

"That stuff again," said Danielle.

"That stuff again." I added, "I'm glad I don't seem to have inconvenienced you, after all. You must have got here well before me. I told you your jeep passed me before Thebes."

She said quite sharply, "And why did you have to go to Itea to find Simon?"

"Oh, I didn't. I—well, he found me quite easily. But, of course, as he didn't know anything about the hired car, that didn't help. We went to look for another Simon, actually a Simonides who keeps a baker's shop near the cinema."

"That's not," said Danielle, "in the olive woods."

I said quickly, "Look, Danielle, I really am terribly sorry about this car."

"You brought it up here." She turned her head to give me a blistering look through the curling smoke. "You keep it. You weren't asked to bring it here. I don't want it. You're stuck with it, and I hope you can afford to pay for it." She turned away to flick ash towards the washbasin. It missed and fell to the floor.

There was a short silence.

I said carefully, "Whom do I pay?"

"Me, of course. Didn't they tell you the deposit had been paid?"

"Oh yes, they told me that."

"So what?" said Danielle.

I stood and picked up my handbag. "Only that it surprises

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me a bit that you didn't call in on the garage after you'd got the jeep, and cancel the car. If you're as short of money as you've been telling us, I'd have imagined the deposit would have come in very handy. Perhaps you'll let me have the receipt, with the address of the garage? "

She sounded sulky. " Tomorrow. I have it somewhere."

" Very well." I turned to smile at Nigel. " I really must go, Nigel, or it'll be dawn before I get to bed. Thank you for letting me see the drawings. I think they're wonderful—I honestly do. Good night."

Simon was on his feet. As I turned to go, he made as if to move forward, but Danielle came off the bed in one quick wriggle like a snake. It brought her very close to him.

" Simon—" the claws were on his arm—" my room's the one at the end, and the shower's stuck, or something. The damned thing drips, and I'll never get to sleep. D'you suppose you could fix it for me? "

" I doubt if I'd be much good with it. In any case I'm seeing Camilla to her hotel now, and then I—"

I said stiffly, " There's not the slightest need to see me back. I can find my way quite easily."

" And then I have to pick up the car. We left it below the shrine."

Nigel had opened the door for me. I looked at Simon, with Danielle clinging to his arm. " You really needn't trouble. The car is my responsibility—as Danielle has pointed out."

His eyes, amused, met mine.

I bit my lip, and said, " All right. I—it's very kind of you."

" Not at all. After all, if the car was hired in my name I've a sort of responsibility myself, wouldn't you say, Danielle? "

She flashed me one look of pure venom under her lashes, then lifted them again to him. Her voice was all honey. " Not really. But if that's how you feel . . . You'll come and fix that shower later, won't you? It really is a bore."

" Not tonight," said Simon. " Good night. And thanks a lot, Nigel. See you later."

On the way down to the hotel, which took about twelve minutes and was very steep and rough, we concentrated on not breaking our ankles and on not talking about Danielle. For me, the first was the easier task of the two.

At the hotel Simon said, " Camilla."

" Yes? "

" Come off it."

I laughed. " Very well."

" I grant you every right to the highest horse, or deepest dudgeon, or whatever it is, in Christendom. All right? "

" Perfectly."

" Don't worry about the damned car. I didn't pursue it in front of—well, back there, but I'll be very glad of it myself now that it's here, so don't give it another thought."

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"I will not," I said clearly, "allow you to pay for my—my folly."

"We will not," said Simon calmly, "argue about it now. You should be in bed. You've had a long day, and tomorrow will probably be longer."

"I shall probably have to go tomorrow."

"Tomorrow? The dudgeon isn't as deep as that, is it?"

"Dudgeons are high. No, it's not that. There may not be a room at the hotel."

"Oh, I forgot. Well, why not come up to the studio? You've seen it. It's plain, but clean. And now it seems—" the grey eyes crinkled at the corners—"that you'll be chaperoned."

"I'll think about it," I said, without much enthusiasm.

He hesitated. "I hope you will. I—please don't go tomorrow. I was hoping you'd come with me."

I stared at him. "But—I thought you were going up Parnassus with Stephanos?"

"I am. I want you to come. Will you?"

I said huskily, "This is absurd."

"I know. But there it is."

"It's your own very private business. Just because I—I bulldozed you into my affairs it doesn't mean you have to ask me to tag along in yours."

The amusement was there again. "No. Will you?"

"Yes. Of course."

"It'll be a long trek. An all-day job. If the hotel say they can't keep you, you'll let me ring up Athens for you and get you into the studio?"

"Ring up Athens?"

"You're not an accredited artist any more than I am. I'll have to arrange for you to come in as a student."

"Oh, of course. And Danielle?"

He grinned. "Maybe archæologists count. If she gives my name to hire a car, she may give Clément's when she wants a room in the studio."

"I suppose so. Well, please ring up Athens for me, and I'll move in tomorrow night. What time do we start?"

"I'll call for you at half past eight." He gave me his sudden smile. "Good night, Camilla. And thank you."

"Good night."

As he turned to go I said before I could prevent myself, "Don't forget to go and fix the taps, will you?"

"Taps," said Simon gently, "bore me. Good night."

Next morning I woke early, so early that I decided to get up and see the ruins on my own before the day's adventures started.

The sun was already hot and bright, though it was only just a little past seven o'clock as I turned into the steep way that climbs between terraced streets to the mountainside above.

This was a flight of wide steps, bounded by whitewashed walls from which the sun beat back. The blinding white was muted

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everywhere by greenery; from every wall and roof spilt vines and hanging ferns, the vivid pinks and scarlets of geraniums, and brilliant cascades of marigolds.

Before I was aware that I had come so far, I found myself clear of the last house, and out on the open hillside above the studio.

The climb had been steep, and the sun was hot. The path led along the foot of a low cliff-wall which cast, at this early hour, a narrow shade. I found a flat rock in a recess of shadow and sat down to recover from the climb. Below me I could see the studio, dumped down raw and square and ugly in its quarried plateau. Beyond it the valley of the olives swam and shimmered in the immense liquid distance of light, and beyond that again mountain after mountain, and the sea.

Then my attention was taken by a movement near the studio. Someone was as early abroad as I. I heard the scuffle of footsteps mounting the rough path that led up from the plateau. Then I saw him, a thin, fair-haired figure carrying a rucksack, and clambering at a good speed but with very little noise towards the path where I sat in the shadow. He was making for the knot of pines above the shrine, and moving away from me rapidly.

He reached the path. He was about seventy yards away, near the fence that marked the graveyard.

I was going to hail him when something about the way he was acting caught my attention, and I stayed still. He had taken a couple of quick steps back and sideways, into the shadow of a pine tree. His head was bent as if he studied the ground at his feet, but I knew, suddenly, that he was listening. He didn't move. There was no sound in the lovely, bright morning but the chime of a goat-bell from the other side of the valley and the crowing of a cock down in the village. No sound from the studio; no movement.

Nigel lifted his head, and was looking about him, still with those wary, abruptly stealthy movements. It was quite obvious that, wherever he was going, he didn't want to be followed; and, remembering Danielle, I thought I saw his point. And I wouldn't interrupt his getaway, either. Smiling to myself, I stayed where I was. He turned suddenly and, leaving the path, plunged uphill through the pines towards the higher levels where the ancient stadium stood, and beyond it the track that led above the Shining Ones and away into the upper reaches of Parnassus.

I got up and went on. Soon I, too, was under the shadow of the pines, and to my right was the thicket of dried weeds that edged the graveyard.

I don't quite know what made me do it, except that somehow, already, Michael Lester's affair was my own. I pushed open the creaking gate and went in among the stones. When I found it I had to spell out the Greek lettering very slowly to be sure it was the one.

This alien cross, an alien epitaph—and in my ear Simon's voice, claiming him still: My brother Michael. And behind that again

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I could hear the ghosts of other voices, other claims: The woman of my house, the cousin of Angelos, the brother of Michael. No man is an island, entire of itself . . .

I stood there in the hot, early-morning silence and thought about Simon. Today, I was committed to Simon's quest. I, too, had answered a claim. He was going to see the place where his brother Michael had died, and he wanted me to go, too.

And I? Why had I said that I would go? I had said last night that it was absurd, and so it was. But I had a queer feeling that, quite apart from Simon's need of me, I had a need of my own. I, too, had something to find.

A bird, small and bright as a blown leaf, flew across the hot stillness. I turned and made my way between the dusty mounds towards the gate.

I was thinking now not of Simon, but of myself. Not of the self, the identity I had felt it so necessary to assert when I had sent back Phil's ring and broken off our engagement, but of the identity I had assumed so lightly yesterday and which, it seemed, I could not yet put off. Not Camilla Haven, but just Simon's girl.

I let myself quickly through the gate and hurried down the path till it brought me out above the ruins of the great shrine.

I walked slowly downhill in the sunlight past the little pomegranate tree, clinging to a cleft in the marble of the theatre. Its leaves hung now without a rustle, dark green and still. The fruit was flame-coloured and as glossy as witchballs. Here were the breakneck steps . . . and here the stage of the theatre. And now the steps to the precinct. That must be the monument of Alexander . . . and this the temple floor of Apollo.

The six great columns stood up like fire against the immense depths of the valley.

No one was about. I crossed the temple floor and sat down at the edge with my back to one of the columns. The stone was hot. Above my head the crumbling capitals were alive with the wings of martins. Far below me the olives shimmered along the valley. In the distance Helicon was blue, was silver, was grey as Aphrodite's doves. Everywhere were the voices of songbirds, because Delphi is sanctuary. Somewhere in the morning distance sheep-bells were ringing.

I left my seat and walked down the Sacred Way from the temple to the edge of the precinct, where a thick rank of pines keeps it from the road below. I went along the path under the pines, then down to the museum which lies in a curve of the road. There was a man in guide's uniform sitting under the trees on the other side of the road.

"The museum?" he said in answer to my query. "I am afraid it isn't open yet."

He had a dark square face and, surprisingly, blue eyes. His look was sophisticated, and he spoke very good English.

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" I want to see the Charioteer."

" Of course." He grinned, showing very white teeth.

" I've heard so much about him, but I can't help wondering if I'll really like him. That narrow forehead and the heavy jaw; it's not strictly a beautiful face, is it? And yet everyone says he is so wonderful."

" And so will you. No picture gives the true impression. Do you know the thing that comes to me first whenever I see him again—which is every day? "

" What? "

" He is so very young. All that gravity, that grace, and so young with it. It used to be thought he was the owner of the team—the winner of the race—but now they say he was probably the driver for some lord who owned the chariot."

I said hesitantly, " There's a bit in Pausanias' account of Delphi, isn't there, about a chariot of bronze with a naked lord of the car who might have had a driver, a youth of good family? "

" I believe there is, yes. But it could hardly apply to our Charioteer, kyria; the evidence is that he was probably buried in a great landslide during an earthquake in 373 B.C. and, without being uncovered again, was built into the—what do you call it?—the supporting wall that was erected to stop the rocks and earth from engulfing the temple."

" Retaining wall," I said.

" Ah, thank you. The retaining wall. Well, you see, our Charioteer had vanished a few centuries before Pausanias came to Delphi."

" I see. I didn't know that."

A cigarette was in his hand. He put it between his lips and lit it with a spluttering of loose tobacco. " They say now that the Charioteer was part of a victory group erected by one Gelon, the winner of the chariot race, but anything may be true. So much was lost or destroyed or stolen over the centuries that the truth about our discoveries is only guesswork. And Delphi suffered much, because she was so rich.

" The landslide that broke and hid the Charioteer was an act of the gods, because it kept him out of the hands of the robbers. The Phocians laid the sanctuary waste barely twenty years after he was buried, and of course in later times countless treasures were destroyed or stolen."

A sudden clatter and a volley of shouts from somewhere behind the museum startled me. " What on earth's that? "

" A little disagreement among the workmen of the archæologists. A mule strayed during the night, and now they have discovered that some tools are missing. They are accusing the men who work on the stadium road of theft, and so—well, you hear that there is a little disagreement."

" A little disagreement? It sounds like a major war! "

I listened to the uproar and lingered for a moment, looking at the closed door of the museum. The guide was watching me through

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the smoke of his cigarette with that shrewd, incurious blue gaze. I said, "Kyrie, you weren't here during the war, of course, but you'll know what happened to the statues from the museum? The Charioteer, for instance? Was he hidden?"

"Only in a manner of speaking. He was in Athens."

"Oh, I see."

Behind me a shabby black car slid to a halt. Simon grinned at me over the door and said, "Good morning."

"Oh, Simon! Am I late? Have you had to hunt for me?"

"The answer to both those is no." He leaned across the car and opened the door for me. "Come along, then; let's go." I slipped quickly into the passenger's seat beside him.

I said, "Don't you ever lose your temper, Simon? Nigel was abominably rude to you last night. Didn't you mind?"

"Mind? No." He paused, and I saw that pucker of worry round his eyes. "Last night there was something wrong. Really wrong, I mean; not just Nigel's too-usual brand of nerves and temperament and frustrated talent, and that little she-witch playing him on a very barbed hook. There was something more."

"Are you sure he wasn't just a bit drunk? He said he was."

"Possibly. But that's part of the trouble—he doesn't drink much as a rule, and last night he was fairly putting it away, though he doesn't like ouzo. I'd give quite a lot to know what was wrong."

"I had the impression he was going to come out with something just as Danielle interrupted."

"Yes, so did I. But I didn't see him again. His room was empty when I went back. I didn't hear him come in."

"Perhaps," I said a little dryly, "he was fixing the taps."

"That did occur to me. But no. Danielle's door was standing open. She wasn't there either. I think they'd gone for a walk, or down to the village for another drink, or something. And Nigel had gone when I got up this morning."

I said, "He went up the mountain. I saw him."

"Alone?"

"Yes. In fact he looked rather as if he wanted to be left very much alone. I didn't speak to him, and I don't think he saw me."

Simon glanced at me, smiling. "Did you make any more discoveries this morning?"

"Only one," I said, before I thought.

"And what was that?"

I found myself telling him, quite simply. "It was just my own discovery. We talked about it last night with Nigel. It's something we're taught from childhood, but I'd never really had it brought home to me till now."

"What is it?"

"That saying of John Donne—"

"Ah yes, that." He was silent for a moment, then he quoted it softly, as if half to himself: "*No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main . . . Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and*

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therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

"What brought that home to you this morning?"

I hesitated, then said flatly, "Michael's grave."

"I see." And I thought he did.

I said, "It's this confounded country. It does things to one—mentally and physically and, I suppose, morally. The past is so living and the present so intense and the future so imminent. The light seems to burn life into you twice as intensely as anywhere else I've known. I suppose that's why the Greeks did what they did so miraculously . . . I'm talking piffle."

"It's good piffle. Go on. What do you find?"

"You find that the grave of Michael Lester is as moving and as important as the tomb of Agamemnon at Mycenæ, or Byron or Venizelos or Alexander. He, and the men like him, are a part of the same picture." I stopped, and then said helplessly, "Greece. What is it that it does to one?"

He was silent a moment. "The secret is that it belongs to all of us—to us of the West. It's given us almost everything our world has that is worthwhile. Truth, straight thinking, freedom, beauty. It's our second language, our second line of thought, our second country. We all have our own country—and Greece."

We sailed round a bend of the road and ahead of us the deep valley opened to show a great rounded beauty of a mountain, silver-green, blue-veined, cloud-grey. "Why, damn it all," said Simon, "that hill in front of us. That's Helicon. *Helicon.* And then you wonder why this country gets you in the wind?"

And we didn't speak again till we came to Arachova and found Stephanos and Niko, his grandson, waiting to set out to lead us to the place where Michael had met his death on Parnassus.

It was indeed very hot. As we climbed steadily north-west, the sun beat down on the right, throwing shadows sharp and hard as graphite along the white rock. The track where we walked was only by courtesy a track. It was not steep, cutting at a slant along the great flank of the mountain, but it was very rough.

We had long since left any trees behind, and the mountainside, unpunctuated now by pine or cypress, stretched one great wing of burning white from the high, hard, blue sky down to the dry watercourse deep on our left.

Beyond the tortured path of this dead stream the rock rose again, this time violently blocked in with cobalt shadow.

High above, so that to glance at them hurt the eyes, three birds hung, circling slowly and with motionless wings, like some mobile toy on invisible threads. I thought I could hear their faint, sweet mewing. Nothing else broke the silence except the scrape and clink of our feet and the sound of our breathing.

The track ran straight up to what looked like a wall of fallen rocks and rubble, and there stopped, obliterated. Stephanos, in front, had halted and turned to speak to Simon who was just behind him. He said something, gesturing towards the barricade of rock.

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It looked like a landslip, a great torrent of red and ochreous earth frozen even as it poured down the steep wing of the mountain. It was spiked with broken rock and great white slabs of fallen limestone. Farther down the mountainside it fanned out like the delta of a red river. Enormous blocks of stone had hurtled down with it, flung carelessly, as by the hand of an angry god, to dam the narrow gash of the watercourse.

Stephanos had turned aside to climb rather painfully up the steep hill-face beside the landslide.

"Is this where we leave the track?" I asked.

Simon turned. "No, that's still with us. This stuff's just lying across it. If we follow Stephanos up a little there's a place where it's safer to cross."

"It must have been quite a storm," I said, surveying the torrent of rocks in front, and the gigantic, flung boulders far below us.

"Not storm. Earthquake," said Simon, then laughed at my expression. "Yes, one forgets, doesn't one? I told you this was a savage country. They've had quite a history of tremors hereabouts."

We made our way slowly across the detritus of the earthquake. From higher up I could see where a whole slice of the mountain-cliff above us had been torn away and thrown down. It had splintered into great white spearheads, against which the smaller fragments were piled in the drift of dark red earth. We scrambled down this uncomfortable ramp towards the path which had shaken itself clear of the debris.

"I suppose the Earthshaker turned over in his sleep," I said, "and not so very long ago. The cracks look fresh, don't they?"

Stephanos must have understood the drift of what I was saying. He had turned to wait for us on the track, and now spoke to Simon.

"What does he say?" I asked.

"He says that there were two or three small shocks—this, by the way, is a small shock—about twelve years ago. A little farther on the mountain has been shifted about much more drastically. He says that only someone who was out on this part of Parnassus almost daily would still know his way about, once he had left the track. He also says that the place we are making for is much changed since he found Michael there. It was just an open space at the foot of a low cliff, and now it's closed by fallen rock into a kind of corrie or hollow."

There was a flash of shocking pink socks beside me as Niko, Stephanos' grandson, dropped off the rubble to land as neatly as a goat. He dragged a water-bottle out of a large pocket and unscrewed the top. "Have a drink, miss."

I drank thankfully. The bottle smelt ammoniac, like a nice donkey, but the water was good and still reasonably cool.

"Greek peasant women," said Niko, watching me with that limpid look of his, "can go for hours over the roughest country without food or drink."

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" So, " I said, stoppering the bottle and handing it back to him, " can camels. Thank you, Niko, that was wonderful."

" It was a pleasure, beautiful miss." Niko turned to Simon and held out the bottle. His look and gesture expressed somehow, the most tender solicitude.

Simon, smiling, shook his head.

Stephanos turned to go on. He and Simon forged ahead once more, and Niko and I took up our positions in the rear.

By the time we were two-thirds of the way to the corrie and had done most of the climbing, I had my second wind and was walking fairly easily. I was, I felt, upholding British womanhood not too badly.

" The Greek peasant women," said Niko, beside me, " used to carry great loads of wood and grapes across here. Regularly."

" If you tell me one more thing about Greek peasant women," I said, " I shall scream and lie down and refuse to move another step. Besides, I don't believe you."

He grinned. " It is not true," he conceded. " I think that you are very wonderful."

" Why, Niko, that's nice of you! "

" Very beautiful, too," said Niko. " Would you like an apple? "

And he fished an apple out of his pocket and handed it to me with very much the air of a Paris presenting the prize to Aphrodite. His look of intense and dazzled admiration was, I felt, one that had been tried before and found to work.

It still worked. My morale soared. I laughed and took the apple and thanked him, and then a diversion was created because neither he nor Stephanos would allow me to eat it without peeling it, and Niko wanted to peel it for me and Stephanos had the knife; so, being Greeks, they plunged into a passionate discussion about this while Simon peeled the apple and then handed it to me.

" For the fairest," he said.

" There's not," I said, " a lot of competition. But thank you all the same."

The corrie did not lie at any great height. Arachova itself is over three thousand feet above sea level, and we had climbed no more than eight or nine hundred feet in all since we had left the village. We were still only in the foothills of the vast highland of Parnassus, but we might have been lost, a million miles from anywhere.

The place wasn't, properly speaking, a corrie. It was a hollow scooped out of a line of low cliffs that topped a steep, mile-long ridge like the crest along a horse's neck. From a distance the cliff looked fairly uniform, but on approach it could be seen that it had been split and torn into ragged bays and promontories where half a hundred winter torrents had gouged their headlong way down the mountainside.

Earthquakes had wrested great chunks from the crag, quarrying back into the limestone face, throwing the enormous debris down,

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so that for hundreds of feet below the jagged cliffs, a loose and sometimes dangerous scree valanced the sloping hillside.

As we neared the edge of this, Stephanos turned aside into a short steep detour that took us out above the level of the cliff-top and we approached the line of crags at a long slant that brought us eventually to the edge.

The old man stopped then, leaning on his crook, and waited for us to come up with him.

Simon stood beside him, looking down. "This is the place?"

"This is the place."

It could have been a quarry hacked out of the cliff-face during countless patient years. It had probably taken five seconds of earthquake for the Earthshaker to tear that semicircular scar back into the cliff and fling the wreckage down before it in still formidable walls of jagged rock. The result of the earthquake's action was to make a roughly circular hollow, a sort of irregular crater some seventy yards across, which was walled to the north by the living cliff on which we stood, and shut in almost completely for the rest of its diameter by the vast sections of tumbled rock.

The centre of the crater floor was clear, but the encircling walls were piled in the now familiar way with red dust and rock-debris. In spring, I thought, it would probably be beautiful, for it was sheltered, and I could see the dead remains of some scrubby plants and bushes where the melting snows and then the rain must have fed some alpine vegetation.

Below us clung the lovely green of a little juniper, and just beside my feet the rock held two thick bushes that looked like holly, but which bore, incongruously, acorns with enormous cups as prickly as sea-urchins.

To the right, on the west side of the corrie, was what appeared to be the only way out. This was a break in the wall of rock, towards which the smooth crater floor lifted in a rocky ramp. From the height where we stood I thought I could see, beyond and below this "gate," the ghost of an old track leading westwards to vanish round a spur of the mountain.

Stephanos caught the direction of my glance.

"That is the way he went."

He spoke in Greek, of course, and Simon translated for me, at the time in snatches and more fully later; but once again I shall put the old man's words down directly, as they came.

"That is the way he went, down the old track towards Amphissa. It comes out above a disused quarry near the Amphissa road, behind the olive groves." He fell silent for a moment or two, looking down at the hollow beneath our feet. No one spoke. The sun beat on the back of our necks.

Then the old man spoke again, slowly, reminiscently. "I came to the head of the cliff just at this point. It was different then, you understand. Here, where we stand, there was a pinnacle of rock like a cat's tooth. It disappeared in the earthquakes, but then it

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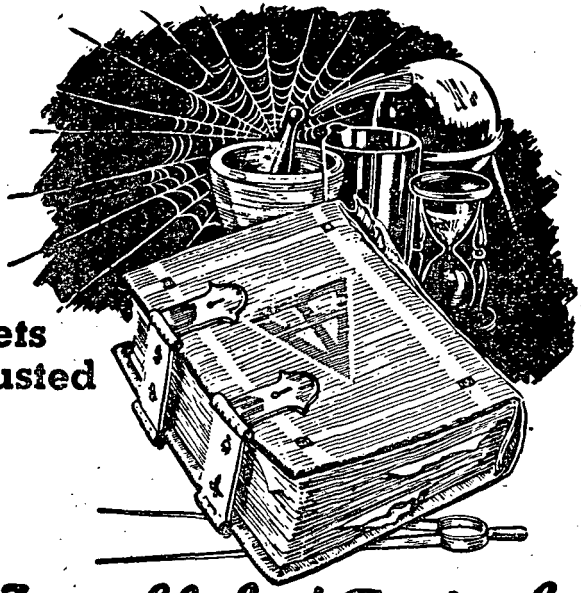

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was a landmark that even an Athenian could not have missed. And below the cliff then there was no hollow, as you see it now, walled and gated like a fortress. There was only the cliff, and below us some big rocks lying, and a space of clean stone.

"It was there that I saw them, Michael and Angelos. And the place is not covered. I marked it, and I know. It was there." The crook pointed.

Almost in the centre of the dazzling floor of smooth stone, a little pile of stones—a cairn—threw a small triangular shadow. "I put those there later," said Stephanos, "after the earthquake had moved the cliff and the place was altered beyond recognition."

He glanced sideways at me. "We will go down now . . . Will you tell the lady to be very careful, Kyrie Simon? The path is steep, and made only for goats, but it is the quickest way."

As Simon transmitted the warning, I saw that there was indeed a path down into the corrie. It left the cliff-top just beside us, between the two bushes of holly-oak, and wound steeply down past more mats of holly and the dusty ghosts of thistles, into the bottom of the hollow. It was down this path that Stephanos himself must have run to Michael Lester's side as he lay dying.

The sun was so high that almost the whole of the corrie-bottom was shadowless. Where the cliff-path debouched on to the level, a wing of rock cast a comforting angle of blue shade. I stopped there, and sat down with my back against the warm stone. Stephanos moved forward, and Simon followed him. Niko flung himself down beside me. I hoped he wouldn't speak, and he didn't. His intent gaze never left the other men.

Stephanos led Simon across the floor of the corrie, and stopped beside the little cairn. He was pointing down at it and talking rapidly now. His hand moved and gestured, then came back to the same spot. Almost I could see the dying man lying there in the baking sun, the shepherd coming to the cliff-top where a fang of rock stuck up like a cat's tooth, the dog dashing down that snaking path, and Angelos, the murderer, turning to bolt out of the "gate" and down the track towards Amphissa and the sea.

Stephanos turned heavily and trudged back to where we sat. He lowered himself down beside me with a sigh, then said something short to Niko, who got out a battered packet of cigarettes and handed him one. He gave his grandfather a light, then turned, with his brilliant smile, to offer a cigarette to me. We lit up in silence.

Simon was still standing in the centre of the corrie, but he wasn't looking down at the cairn where his brother had died. He had turned, and that cool appraising stare of his was slowly raking the sides of the corrie—the tumbled wall of rock that hemmed us in, the great sections that had fallen outward from the crag and now made the two side-wings of the corrie piled high in vast slabs and wedges against the old solid rock of the cliff, the hollow curve of a shallow cave, exposed in the scooped segment of broken crag, a cave that had been deep before the front of the cliff had fallen away and left its recesses naked to the air.

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My cigarette was mild and loosely packed and tasted slightly of goat; there was something about the beautiful Niko, I reflected, that harked back fairly consistently to the lower animals. I had half smoked it, and Niko's was gone entirely, when Simon's shadow fell beside us.

"What about lunch?" he asked.

The slight tension—of Stephanos' making, not Simon's—was broken, and we chatted over lunch as if it had been a normal picnic. We had cheese in thick juicy slices; a paper full of olives that felt as if they were warm from the tree but were really warm from Niko; a hard-boiled egg; a very sweet cake made with fresh cherries; and a large handful of grapes, also warm and slightly tired-looking, but tasting ambrosially of the sun.

I noticed that Simon, as he ate, still looked about him, his eyes returning time after time, thoughtfully, to the recently-torn cliff behind us.

"And this was done in the earthquake that you spoke of, soon after the war?"

Stephanos said, through a mouthful of cake, "That is so. There were three or four shocks that year. It was 1946. The villages were not affected, but a lot of rock was moved up here."

He jerked his head towards the cliff. "This is not the only place of its kind. All along this ridge there are places where the tremors have taken bites out of the hill. There are three, four, five hollows, much like this one, where very little trace of the original cliff-face remains. Only the goat-track that we came down on . . . see? There the cliff itself has not been moved, but the rocks are piled against it as high as a ruined church. Oh yes, I told you, Kyrie Simon, that a man who was not always out on the hill would soon miss his landmarks."

"This pinnacle, for instance, that used to stand above the cliff?"

"It was only a few feet high, but it served as a landmark for kilometres around. It was what guided me to Michael on that day. He knew of a cave here, he said, near the Cat's Tooth, and he meant to lie up in it until the German drive was over. I came bringing him food, and to try to make him come back to Arachova where his wound might be cared for."

Simon's eyes were on the shallow apse of the exposed cave. They were narrowed slightly, as if against the sun, and his face gave nothing away. "A cave? That one? It would be deep enough before half of it fell in."

Stephanos lifted his heavy shoulders. "I do not know if that was the one. Some parts of Parnassus are a honeycomb of such places where an army could hide in safety."

Simon got slowly to his feet, and stood looking down at the old man sitting heavily in the shade.

"And you carried Michael from here to Delphi?"

Stephanos smiled. "It was fourteen years ago, and I was younger. And the way to Delphi is much shorter than the way we came—but steep, you understand, because Arachova lies four

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hundred metres higher than Delphi. That is a big start on a climb like this, so we came by Arachova today."

"I still think it was . . . well, quite a feat. And now I want a good look at that cave. It seems as if there's another small opening at the back of it. Will you come?"

"I will come."

"Niko?"

One swift graceful wriggle, and Niko was on his feet and brushing dust from his trousers.

"I come. I have very good eyesight, me. If there is anything to be seen, I will see it. I can see in the dark as well as any cat, so if there is an inner cave I shall guide you, Kyrie Simon."

"We'll follow your socks," said Simon dryly, and Niko grinned. The socks flashed across the corrie at a run, and were dimmed in the shadow of the cave's recess. Stephanos got slowly to his feet.

Simon looked down at me and raised his eyebrows. I shook my head, so he and Stephanos left me, and went more slowly in the wake of the luminous socks. A buttress of shadow swallowed them.

I finished the cigarette and stubbed it out, then sat relaxed and still, enjoying the shade and the silence and the bright dazzle of heat beyond my shadowed corner. The men were out of sight, either in the cave or somewhere beyond. The silence was intense, thick as the heat. I was part of it, sitting as still as a lizard on my stone.

Some movement, real or imagined, at the head of the cliff-path caught my eye, and I turned to look, wondering idly if Niko had found some way back to the cliff's head while I had been sitting there half asleep. But there was nothing, only the sun hammering on the white rock.

The shadows, purple and anthracite and red, seemed themselves to flicker with movement. Against the violent patterns of light and shade, the green of the holly-oaks and the cool curve of the juniper arching out from the face of the cliff were as refreshing as the sound of a spring. I remembered suddenly that as I had clambered down past them there had been other green things below us, hardly noticed in the hazards of that steep exhausted scramble down the cliff.

Where there was green, there must certainly be water . . . cold water, not Niko's tepid bottle that smelt of goat. The thought brought me eagerly to my feet. A shadow at the cliff-top flickered again, but I hardly noticed. My eyes were on the corner below the slim bow of the juniper where, like a mirage, showed a glimpse of vivid emerald.

I got up, skirting the corrie's edge, picking my way between the enormous fallen blocks. I slid between two rough rocks that caught at my clothes, bent my head to pass under a wing of limestone that shored up the cliff like a flying buttress—and there was the grass. The colour was so startling, and so beautiful after the dazzling changes rung by sun and stone, that I must have stood quite still gazing at it.

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It flowed in a deep and vivid ribbon of green between two boulders streaked liberally with the red of waterborne iron. But there was no water now.

There might be some spring, I thought, that was dependent on intermittent showers high on the peaks; perhaps, like snow on the desert's face, the grass sprang up in the wake of a shower and faded with the next day's sunset. It lay there, itself like a small pool of cool water, a green thought in a green shade, moist to the touch, and lending the corner of the corrie a freshness that the shadowed rock had not had.

I sat down gratefully, with my hands spread on the ground and the soft grass springing up between my fingers. Among the green were tiny flowers, bells of pale blue, like pigmy harebells. Some of these grew on the face of the cliff itself, and their seeds had, in the last decade, flown and rooted everywhere in the fallen debris of earthquake. Only here in this moist corner were they still in flower, but I could see fading clumps of seeding stems on all sides among the boulders.

Other alpines had grown here, too; there was something with a pale furry leaf and a thin dry flower-stem left sticking out like a humming-bird's tongue; a tuft of tendrils dried into hexagonal shapes till they looked like bunches of brown chicken-wire; a tiny plant of acorned holly, rooting purposefully in a thin crack.

Then with another shock of pleasure I saw one more flower that had not yet died of drought. In a cleft just above eye level there was a plant of cyclamen. The leaves, blue-green and veined palely, were held out in stiff formal curves on their red stems. The flowers were soft rose-pink, a dozen of them, and clung like a flight of moths to the dry cliff. Below the flowers, in the same cleft, grew the remains of another rock-plant, dead, fraying away to dust in the drought. Above it the cyclamen's flowers looked pure and delicate and strong.

Something, some recent memory, was fretting at the edge of my mind. I found myself wondering, without knowing why, what Nigel was doing now.

The search of the cave yielded nothing, and Simon did not want to delay Stephanos and Niko by making a more prolonged investigation. We left the corrie by the gap in the west side, and scrambled down the steep slope below the scree. We had nearly reached the bottom of the dry valley that lay below the ridge when we came on the barely-visible track I had glimpsed from the top of the crags. Even this was appallingly rough going.

We made our careful way along it for some hundred yards or so, and then it forked. The right branch fell steeply away, curling out of sight almost at once round a spur of cliff. The left-hand branch turned downhill for Delphi. We took this, and in just over half the time the outward journey had taken, we saw ahead of us the edge of the high land and, beyond it, the gap where the Pleistos valley cuts its way down to the sea.

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Stephanos paused and spoke to Simon. The latter turned to me.

"Stephanos has come back this way because he thinks you may be tired. This path will lead you straight down to Delphi. It comes out above the temple, and you can get down behind the Shining Ones, and then through the stadium. The drop down to the cliff-top is steep, but there's no danger if you take care. I'll come down with you if you like, but you can't possibly miss the way."

I must have looked slightly surprised, because he added, "The car's at Arachova—remember? I thought I'd go back along the top with Stephanos now, and collect it. But there's no need to drag you the whole way."

I said gratefully, "Oh, Simon—that car! I'd forgotten all about it. I must confess I'll be awfully glad if you will. I can't possibly get lost between here and Delphi."

I turned holding out a hand to Stephanos to thank him, and then did the same to Niko.

The old man nodded gravely over my hand and turned away. Niko took it with a melting look from those beautiful eyes and said, "I will see you again, miss? You come to Arachova often?"

"I hope so. And now good-bye, and thank you."

"Good-bye, miss. Thank *you*, beautiful miss." The luminous socks plunged away along the path after Stephanos.

Simon grinned. "Take care of yourself, then. See you at dinner." And with a lift of the hand he was gone in the wake of the shocking pink socks.

I stared after him for a few seconds, but he didn't look back. I turned and began to make my careful way down towards Delphi.

It was late afternoon, and the sun was straight ahead of me when at length I came out on top of one of the great cliffs that stand above the shrine at Delphi. Far below me and to the right lay the temple precincts, its monuments and porticoes and its Sacred Way looking small and very clean-cut in the sun, like the plaster models that you see in museums. The pillars of Apollo were foreshortened, and tiny as toys.

Directly beneath me was the cleft of the Castalian Spring. The tangle of trees filled it like a dark waterfall. Already, beyond the tree-filled cleft, the Flamboyant cliff was taking the late afternoon sun like flame.

I sat quietly, chin on hand, looking down at the dreaming marbles of the shrine, at the blue-and-silver depths of the valley where hawks circled below eye level . . .

"What are you doing up here?"

The question came from close behind me. I turned sharply. Danielle had come out from behind the thicket of juniper. Today she had on a wide bell of scarlet skirt and a turquoise-coloured blouse that was open at the neck. Very open. The inevitable cigarette clung to her bottom lip. Her mouth was painted a pale pink against her sallow skin. Today her fingernails were pale

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pink too. On the thin brown hands it looked odd and slightly improper.

"Why, hullo," I said pleasantly. If I was to be the girl's neighbour tonight in the studio, it didn't do to let last night's irritation with her bad manners reappear.

But Danielle had no such scruples. It was quite obvious that manners, bad or good, had no place in her scheme of things. She repeated in that sharp voice that sounded as if she really wanted to know, "What are you doing up here?"

I said, letting a note of mild surprise creep in, "Sitting looking at the view. And you?"

She came towards me. She moved like a model, hips thrown forward and knees close. She stood between me and the edge of the cliff—one hip out, toes at twenty past seven, one thin hand gesturing with the cigarette. Any minute now she would open her mouth and let the tip of her tongue appear.

She said, "It's a long climb from the shrine on a hot afternoon."

"Isn't it? Has it tired you very much, or did you just come round the top from the studio?"

She gave me a glittering glance. I couldn't see for the life of me why she should care what I was doing up here, but she obviously did. And I certainly wasn't going to tell her where we had been. That was Simon's pilgrimage, and no one else's. If he chose to take me along, well, that was his affair. But I wasn't going to tell Danielle.

She said, "Where's Simon?"

"I don't know," I said truthfully. "Were you looking for him?"

"Oh, not really." To my surprise she came forward and sat down not two yards from my feet. She swore once viciously in French as her hip met a thistle, then she settled herself gracefully on the dusty ground and smiled at me.

"A cigarette?"

"Why, thanks very much," I said, before I thought.

She regarded me in silence, while I smoked and tried not to feel annoyed that now I could hardly get up and leave her, which I very much wanted to do. I wondered why she had offered the olive branch, and eyed her warily. *I fear the Greeks when they bring gifts . . .*

"You weren't in to lunch at the hotel."

"No," I agreed. "Were you?"

"Where did you have lunch?"

"I had a picnic. Out."

"With Simon?"

I raised my eyebrows and tried to register cold surprise at the inquisition. It had no effect whatever.

"With Simon?" she repeated.

"Yes."

"I saw him go out in the car."

"Did you?"

"He picked you up somewhere?"

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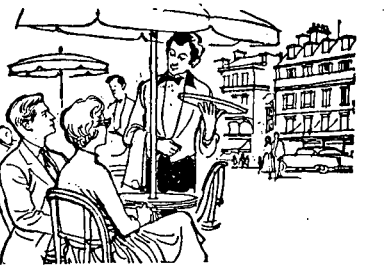

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"Yes."

"Where did you go?"

"South."

This set her back for half a minute. Then she said, "Why don't you want to tell me where you went and what you've been doing?"

I looked at her rather helplessly. "Why should I?"

"Why shouldn't you?"

"Because," I said, "I don't like being catechised."

She digested this. "Oh?" She turned those big tired eyes up to me and asked, "Why? Have you and Simon been up to something?"

Said by Danielle, the harmless question could mean only one thing. I said explosively, "No, Danielle. We have not."

I began to laugh. "We took the car to Arachova and left it there, then we walked back over the hill towards Delphi. We had a picnic at a place where there is a lovely view of Parnassus. I came on towards home and Simon went back for the car. If you sit here long enough you'll see him drive past below you. In case you don't know it by sight, the car you hired is a big black one. I don't know the make. I know very little about cars. Will that do? And thank you for the cigarette. I must be going." I stubbed out the two-thirds-smoked cigarette and got to my feet.

She made a little movement without getting up, a sinuous little wriggle in the dust like a snake. She smiled up at me. The cigarette had dropped from her lip and was smouldering on the ground beside her. She made no attempt to retrieve it. She was smiling and showing pretty white teeth with her tongue between them. The tongue was pale like her lips and nails. "You're annoyed with me," she said.

I felt suddenly very old with all the adult weight of my twenty-five years. "My dear girl," I said, "what could possibly lead you to imagine that?"

"You see, it's only," said Danielle from the dust, "that I'm jealous about Simon."

I wanted passionately to turn and run, but this gambit hardly provided me with a good exit line. I merely shed most of those adult years at one go and said feebly and childishly, "Oh?"

"Men," said the voice of the dust-snake, "are all the same, mostly. But there really is something about Simon. I expect even you feel it, don't you? On the whole my lovers bore me, but I want Simon. I genuinely do."

"Really."

"Yes. Really." The flat little voice held no inflection. "And I can tell you just what it is about Simon. It's—"

I said sharply, "No, really, Danielle!"

She shot me a look. "You're in love with him yourself, aren't you?"

"Don't be absurd!" To my horror I sounded almost too emphatic. "I hardly know him! And besides, this is not the—"

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" What difference does that make? It takes me two seconds to know whether I want a man or not."

I turned away. " Look," I said, " I must go. I expect I'll be seeing you later. Good-bye."

" Are you seeing him again tomorrow? "

The question was said idly, in that same flat voice; but it was not quite idle. Something made me pause and turn back to her. I said, " I—I'm not sure."

" What's he doing tomorrow? "

Definitely not quite idle. I said, " How do I know? " as coldly as I could, before it occurred to me that I did know, quite well. He would certainly go straight back to the corrie to look for Michael's hypothetical cave. And he just as certainly wouldn't want Danielle tagging after him. The whole of this embarrassing interview seemed to indicate that she was prepared to do just that.

I said, in the tone of one conceding a point to a stubborn adversary, " All right. I'll tell you. I am seeing him. We're going to Levadia for the day. There's a horse fair, and gipsies, and he wants to take photographs."

" Oh." She was looking away over the valley with eyes narrowed against the sun. Then she sent another of those glinting looks up at me. " But what a bloody waste," she said.

Though I was used to her by now, I didn't quite manage to control the little flicker of anger that ran through me. I said, " So he didn't come to repair the taps last night? "

The beautiful eyelashes fluttered, and her eyes narrowed over a look of the most intense venom. " You're very outspoken, aren't you? " said Danielle.

" My bad manners," I said. " I'm sorry. And now I must go if I'm to get a bath before dinner. See you later. Did you know I was to come and stay at the studio from tonight? "

Her eyes opened wide. The dislike was still there, and now annoyance, and then both were suddenly, curiously, overlaid by what looked like calculation. " That'll be convenient, won't it? " said Danielle, meaning what only Danielle could mean. Then I saw her look change again. It slid over my shoulder and I saw surprise in her face, and something else.

I turned quickly.

A man had come out from behind the clump of juniper. He was obviously Greek; dark, broad-cheekboned, with crisp curled hair that showed a hint of grey, and a smudge of a moustache over a mouth at once thin-lipped and sensual. He was of medium height, and stockily built. I guessed his age to be around forty. He was dressed in a grey striped suit, rather shabby, and a dark crimson shirt with a vermilion tie that would have clashed if the colours had not been harmlessly faded.

He spoke in French. " Hullo, Danielle."

It was as if he had told her quite plainly, " *It's all right.*"

I could see the look of surprise fade. She relaxed. " Hullo. How did you know I was here? "

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I thought, Because you've just been together behind the juniper bushes and I interrupted you. Then I shook the thought away with the wry reflection that this was what contact with Danielle did. Five minutes with her, and a full half-pound of civet would hardly sweeten the imagination.

Danielle said idly—too idly—from the dust, "This is Camilla Haven. She's been out with Simon this afternoon and she's sleeping at the studio tonight."

The man bowed and sent me a smile. "Enchanté."

"Dimitrios," said Danielle to me, "is—"

"A guide," said Dimitrios. "Mademoiselle has been to see the shrine this afternoon?"

As if you hadn't heard from behind your juniper bush, I thought. I said, "No. I went this morning early."

"Ah. And now you come up to the top of the Shining Ones to see the last of the sun."

I said, "It'll be some time before it's dark, surely?"

"Perhaps not so long," said Dimitrios. I saw Danielle turn her head to look at him. Her head was on a level with my thigh, and I couldn't see her eyes for the curtaining lashes. Something crept along my spine like a cold-footed insect. The man, no less than the girl, gave me the creeps.

I gave myself another of those hearty mental shakes. "I must be going. If I'm to have a bath before dinner and arrange about—"

"These rocks," said Dimitrios, "are called the Pheidriades, the Shining Ones. Always I tell my tourists the story of the Shining Ones. Between them flows the Castalian Spring, whose water is the best in Greece. Have you tried the water of the Spring, mademoiselle?"

"No, not yet. I—"

He came a step nearer. I was between him and the edge of the cliff. "They stand over the shrine like guardians, do they not? Because that is what they are. They were not only the protectors of the holy place, but they were themselves the place of execution. People were executed on these cliffs—for sacrilege, mademoiselle. Did you know that?"

"No. But—"

Another step. He was smiling, a smile of great charm. He had a pleasant voice. Beside me in the dust I saw Danielle lift her head. I saw that her eyes now watched me, not the man. She was smiling at me with the utmost friendliness, her eyes for once bright, not tired at all. I moved back from him a step or two. It brought me within four feet of the edge.

Dimitrios said suddenly, "Be careful." I jumped and his hand came out to my arm. It was gentle on the flesh. "You are not here for execution as a traitor to the god, mademoiselle."

He laughed, and Danielle smiled; and I thought suddenly, wildly, Why can't I just pull my arm away and run? I hate the pair of them and they frighten me, and here I stand because it isn't polite to go while the damned man's talking.

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" I always tell my tourists," he was saying, "one particular story. There was a traitor who was brought up here for execution. Two of them came with him to the edge—just there—to throw him over. He looked over—yes, mademoiselle, it is a long way down, is it not? And then he said to them, ' Please will you not send me over face first, please will you let me fall with my back to the drop? ' One understands how he felt, mademoiselle? "

His hand was still on my arm. I pulled back against it. It slid gently up the flesh to the inside of my elbow.

His voice quickened a little in my ear, " So they threw him over, mademoiselle. They threw him over, and as he fell he—"

I started to turn from him, pulling my arm away, but his fingers tightened. His nails were bitten to the quick, his thumb badly cut and crusted with dried blood. I said breathlessly, " Let me go. I don't like heights. Let me go."

He smiled. " One understands how he felt, mademoiselle, does one not? " he repeated, his fingers bruising my arm.

I tried to stifle a scream.

He gave an exclamation under his breath. He turned sharply.

Three people, a man and two women, were coming along the path from the direction of Arachova.

His hand dropped from my arm. I shot back from the brink of the cliff the way a cork leaves the very best champagne, and hurried down the path in the wake of the three tourists. Neither the Greek nor the girl made any move to follow me.

I came to the stadium. The flat race-track lay empty and silent in the sun, cupped in its tiers of marble seats. I almost ran across the bare dust, hurried between the columns of the starting-gate, and down into the path that led to the shrine. I found that my heart was still hammering in my breast, and my throat was tight. The path dipped, dropped, twisted past a well where water trickled, and came precipitously down on to the smooth track above the theatre. There were my three tourists, still comfortably trudging along. It was quite safe to stand here under the trees and wait for my heart to slow down. Quite safe . . .

The slanting sun was golden on the quiet stones, was apricot, was amber, was a lovely liquid wash of light and peace. A bee went past my cheek. Beside me was the pomegranate tree. The fruit glowed in the rich light. I remembered the cool feel of it in my hand last night, and Simon's voice saying, " *Eat it soon, Persephone; then you'll have to stay in Delphi . . .*"

Well, I was going to stay. I was determined to stay. My breathing was back to normal. Apollo the healer had done his work.

Even when, washing that evening, I saw on my bare arm a streak of dried blood—Dimitrios' blood from that cut thumb—I felt only a brief moment of disgust. I had been stupid and imaginative and had had a fright; that was all. I went to bed early in my bare studio room, and was soon asleep.

It must have been close on three o'clock in the morning when something woke me. My room was second from the end of the

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long corridor, next to Danielle's, and at the opposite end from the outer door, near which were the rooms of the two men. The Dutch painter had gone that day, so we four were the only occupants of the studio.

For some time I lay in that heavy state between sleep and waking where it is hard to disentangle reality from the trailing clouds of dreams. Something had woken me . . .

From the next room came the sound of a movement, and then the creak of the bed—two sounds so completely normal and expected that they should never have roused me further. But with them came a third sound that brought my eyes wide open in the dark and my cheek up off the pillow.

Someone was talking, very softly: a man.

My first thought was embarrassment at having heard; my next irritation, succeeded by disgust. If Danielle had to have her lover in her room I didn't want to be pilloried, sleepless, on the other side of a too-thin partition.

I turned over with as much fuss of bedclothes and creak of bedsprings as I could, to let them know how thin the wall was, then I pulled the sheet—it was too hot for blankets—over my head, and tried to stop my ears to the sounds that succeeded the whispering.

Sleep had gone for good. I lay rigid under the sheet with my eyes wide open in the darkness and my hands as hard as I could bear to hold them over my ears. It wasn't that I'm particularly a prude; but being forced to listen in on anyone's more private moments isn't pleasant, and I didn't want any part or parcel or hint of the more private moments of Danielle. Her public moments were quite embarrassing enough.

I wondered how the unpleasant Dimitrios had got into the place. Even though he was only here to visit Danielle, I didn't one bit like the idea of his being free to come and go. I supposed that he might have climbed in by her window, and sooner or later would leave the same way.

I waited, furious with Danielle for subjecting me to this, furious with myself for minding, furious with Dimitrios for pandering to her monstrous egotism. It was a beastly experience.

How long it was before there was quiet from the next room I don't know. It seemed an age. But after a while all was silent except for the whispering again, and then I heard someone moving furtively across the floor. I waited for the sounds of the window, and the cat-foot drop to the ground outside. But they didn't come.

I heard the door to the corridor open, and steps went stealthily past my door.

That brought me upright in bed with a quick nervous jerk of the heart. If Danielle wanted to let a man in and out of her room, very well. But she had no damned right to let a man like Dimitrios loose inside the place.

Had she—*had she?*—given him a key?

Then, out of the dark, came another thought that kicked through

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those nerves again. Perhaps it wasn't Dimitrios at all. Perhaps it was Nigel.

I was out of bed and had thrust my feet into my slippers, and was shrugging my way into a dressing-gown, before I quite realised myself what I was going to do. Then I had fled across the little room and had, very softly, opened my door and was peering out into the corridor.

I suppose this bit isn't pretty. It wasn't any business of mine if Nigel had gone to Danielle's room and got what had been so patently his heart's desire. But when I had thought of him I had had a memory, sudden and bright and clean, of the young eagerness of Nigel's face, the vulnerable eyes and the weak mouth and the boy's beard. And I had seen his drawings, the visions of tree and flower and stone that he had translated with such impeccable and yet impassioned skill.

If this, too, was Nigel, I had to know. Call it sheer, vulgar, woman's curiosity if you like, but I had to know if the impossible Danielle could really annexe him like that—if she was really prepared to make Nigel, whom she despised, squander himself in worship at her shoddy little shrine.

I believe I was thinking, incoherently, that something must be done to stop her ruining Nigel and then, even more incoherently, of Simon. Simon must be told tomorrow. Simon would know what to do.

I slipped softly out of my room. The outer door at the end of the corridor had its upper half of glass, and outside it the dark was slackening off into dawn. The pane was grey. Against it I saw him. He was almost at the end of the corridor, standing outside a door—Nigel's door—as if he had paused there waiting for something. I shrank against the wall, but even if he had looked back he could not have seen me against the darkness at my end of the passage.

I stayed still, pressed against the cold marble, and felt humiliated and angry and ashamed all at once, wishing I hadn't known, wishing I was still fathoms deep in sleep, wishing I could remember Nigel by his work and not, as now, through the smudgy little whispers of Danielle. *Men are all the same anyway . . . it bores me. I want Simon. I genuinely do . . .*

The silhouette at the corridor's end moved at last, took a step forward and put his hand to the knob of the door. Then he paused again momentarily, with his head bent as if listening.

I thought I must have made some sound and that he had heard me, because I could see now that it wasn't the Greek: it was too tall. It wasn't Nigel either.

It was Simon . . .

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★ ***The fourth part of My Brother Michael by Mary Stewart appears in next month's ARGOSY***

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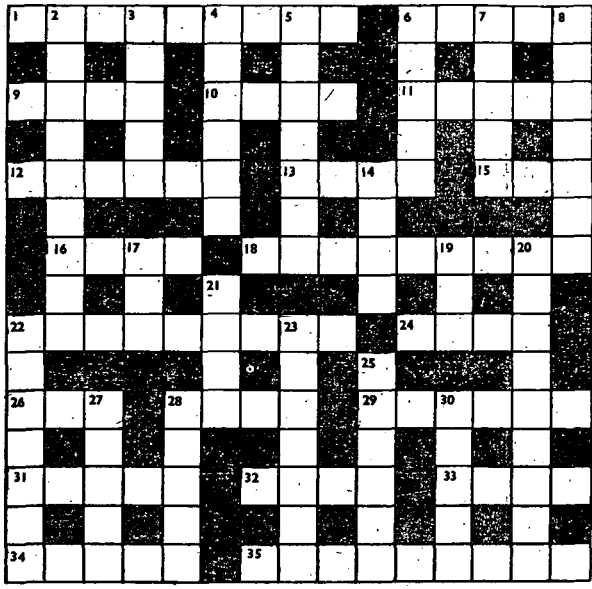
ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 107

★



CLUES

Across

1 For Druidical fun and games ? (9).

6 Commoner than half-pence (5).

9 Ailing in midstream (4).

10 Spicy symbol of Parliament (4).

11 Dwarf or giant in fishing fleet (5).

12 Add zest to festive time ? (6).

13 A fish or a boat (4).

15 The first Christmas marked a new one (3).

16 Spokes centre on muddled Scot (4).

18 Quasimodo's gipsy protegée (9).

22 Chatterer's limit ? (9).

24 Take Hester out of town—smart ! (4).

26 "And —, mast-high, came floating by" (Coleridge) (3).

28 Ramble at random for Persian poet (4).

29 O, Sally, what base metals ! (6).

31 Artist offers alternative to pencil (5).

32 Christmas mail at stake (4).

33 Called out by Tennyson (4).

34 She's nice with an engineer (5).

35 Ski turns or points in TV quiz ? (9).

Down

2 Ain't inert ? No, on the move (9).

3 Spenser's man of iron (5).

4 Weasel's rich relation (6).

5 Low type in minerals makes for northern isles (7).

6 Puss in the pool at poker (5).

7 It's stuffy round cathedral (5).

8 Harem queen in Xmas pudding (7).

14 Cotton-pickers' hoe-down ? (4).

17 Fib may be OK for golfer (3).

19 Wood, even if burnt (3).

20 Beguiling bird (5, 4).

21 Moslem priest says he's in morning (4).

22 Crown supporter, fed on plum-cake (7).

23 Marley's partner (7).

25 Mimosa on turkey ? (6).

27 Silas Marner's "treasure" (5).

28 Lightweight leopard (5).

30 Its double's proverbially horned (5).

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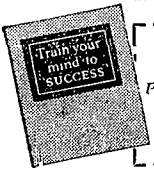

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